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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[BEFORE THE MAJOR HAD REALIZED THAT ANYTHING WAS WRONG HIS IDOLIZED WIFE HAD FALLEN ON THE GROUND.]

VERNON'S DESTINY.

CHAPTER I.

It was an English schoolroom, but as great a contrast to the bare, uncheerful apartments we are apt to associate with the idea of educational premises as well could be; a large, handsome room, furnished in leather, with bright crimson cloth on the table, and curtains of the same hue, a thick warm carpet, and before the hearth a black fur rug, on which half sat, half knelt, a bevy of girls.

It was the pleasantest hour of the day. Lessons were over, no governess was on duty, and the young ladies were supposed to be taking their supper.

The supper, however, waited, and the girls talked over the fire, telling little secrets, making little confidences, a greater freedom in their mirth, perhaps, because the next day was the beginning of the Christmas vacation, when they went to their own homes, to be free for some six weeks from the toils of Minerva House; and, perhaps, a touch of

gravity on them, unknown to themselves, because, for one of the six, school life ended for ever to-morrow.

The most winning and the best beloved of all Mrs. Hamilton's pupils to-morrow took her plunge into the vortex of social life as a grown-up young lady.

There were more than twenty pupils at Minerva House, but these six constituted the "first class." They were all of an age when emancipation could not be very far off, for the youngest was near her eighteenth birthday.

All were stylish-looking, attractive girls. One of them was an earl's daughter; but a stranger's eye would have rested longest on her whose school-days were so nearly over—Helen Charteris.

She was just nineteen, of middle height, her waving brown hair coiled low on her neck and straying in loose curls on her forehead, her eyes deep intense blue, their long lashes fringing her fair cheek and showing its delicate purity of colour. They were wonderful eyes; so dark that in moments of strong excitement their colour turned to black. For

the rest, Helen was slight and delicate-looking. She moved with singular grace, and had a sweet musical voice.

An artistic friend of Mrs. Hamilton declared Miss Charteris was capable of deeper feeling than any woman he had ever met.

He might be right, but at present there had been nothing in Neil's career to prove his words.

Her mother dead, her father absent in India, she had led a happy, sheltered life beneath the roof of Minerva House, passing through the many gradations, from youngest and spoilt pet to head girl, without any particular joy or sorrow.

Two years before her father had died; but his memory had been so little to Helen, she could feel no real grief; and perhaps the greatest trial she had ever known was the separation from her twelve years' home, which threatened her on the morrow, when she must take up her residence beneath the roof of a certain Major Merton, who had been appointed by her father's will sole guardian of his heiress and one of the trustees to her ample fortune.

"Do speak, someone, please," pleaded Lillian Forrester, the youngest of the group; "it is just like a Quakers' meeting. I know I shall scream, or do something desperate, if this silence goes on!"

"If we are all ready, we had better try the cards," suggested the Sybil of the party, Margaret Deane; "it is getting late, and made-moiselle may be down on us at any moment."

Lies formed a half circle round the fire, and a large music book having been spread in the middle to act as table, Margaret produced a pack of cards, the deepest silence reigned. The look of eager expectation on the young faces told how very real to them was this mysterious ceremony.

Every eye was fixed on Margaret as she deliberately spread the cards in a heap on the improvised table, and signed to the girl next her to choose one, and then the next, and so on. Lastly, she made her own choice. The rest of the cards were put away, and Margaret with a kind of key of the fates stood ready to interpret her friend's future.

"Who shall begin?" cried Lillian. "Maggie, I'm shaking all over like an aspen leaf. If you don't put me out of my suspense soon I shall expire at your feet."

"Let Lil have her first turn," interposed Miss Charteris, "and then go straight on as we are setting."

"Agreed."

Lil with dancing eyes and a well-assumed expression of terror about her pretty little mouth, turned up the card she had all this time been holding in her delicate hand. It proved not to be one of an ordinary pack, but seemingly here upon its face a single flower—a rose.

Margaret consulted her paper.

"An English garden rose. Peace and plenty, happy married love. Oh, Lil, you will ask us all to the wedding, won't you? And he sure and have a tremendous cake!"

Lil looked triumphant. She played a little absently with a ring on her left hand, and seemed as dignified as though an important step in life already separated her from her companions.

Margaret's turn came next—a wallflower. Her fate was to be "unfaithful in friendship, too cold for love." And a little laugh arose at her expense—a general prediction she would be an old maid. She smiled serenely.

"I think old maids have much the best of it. They never look half so fatigued and care-worn as married folk. I shouldn't mind a bit if I knew I should be plain Margaret Deane all my days."

"Now, Nell."

An eager flush of expectancy coloured Nell's fair cheeks as she bent forward to read the oracle, her card outstretched—a pale white hyacinth.

Margaret's face changed colour, and she said nothing.

"Read it out," cried the others breathlessly, "we want to hear Nell's fortune."

"Read it, Maggie," said Miss Charteris, gently. "What's the matter, that you look so pale?"

"I'd rather not read it if I could, indeed."

"What nonsense!" cried Lil, indignantly. "Of course, we know it's only a game. I believe you think Nell will be frightened at anything in your wretched little book."

"You had better tell us, dear," said Nell gravely, "as Lil says it is only a game."

Thus agreed, poor Margaret had no alternative but to go on.

"White hyacinth—sorrow, unhappiness, perhaps death."

An awful spell fell on the little group. It had been easy enough to declare "it was only a game, they didn't mind a bit what card they drew;" they were all just a little superstitious, and they could not shake off the impression produced by the unlucky incident. I don't believe one of them was sorry when the French teacher appeared and hustled them off to bed, whilst the then remaining fortunes were untold.

Lady Lillian Forrester and Miss Charteris shared the same room. Lil's pretty head was soon on the pillow, but Helen sat with her brush in her hand, looking idly into the glass, and not attempting to prepare for rest.

"Nell!" cried her friend at last. "I do believe you are foolish enough to be worrying over that absurd fortune?"

Nell shivered.

"I am not; not exactly, Lil, only it fits in."

"With what, I should like to know?"

"I had such a strange dream last night. I thought I was on a ship which was being wrecked, and a man was trying to save me by throwing me a rope of white hyacinths."

"Nell, how strange!"

"Wasn't it?"

"Did you see his face?"

"Oh, yes."

"And was he a gentleman or just a common sailor?" inquired Lady Lillian, with considerable interest.

"A gentleman, decidedly; he had the handsomest face I ever saw, and beautiful dark eyes!"

"You will marry him!" pronounced Lil decidedly. "Of course, that's the meaning of the dream."

"I don't think so!"

"Have you told me all, Nell?"

"Very nearly. I don't remember the faces of anyone else on the ship, but I know a great many people were there, and the strangest of all was that the danger threatened only me."

"But it *couldn't*," objected Lil, practically; "if the ship was going to be wrecked everyone on board must have been in equal peril."

Helen shook her head,

"I can't explain it! I only know it was just as I have told you."

"Go on," said Lil, encouragingly; "it's nearly as good as a novel, Nell. What was your hero's name?"

"I don't know."

"Not know?"

"No; I only remember that he offered to save me; that he stretched out a rope of beautiful white hyacinths to drag me from my peril."

"And you refused?"

"I—I don't know; he was holding the rope still when I awoke. He was just a little way off, you know; if I had taken hold of it I should have been quite safe, only—"

"Only what?"

"There was a gold ring between us," said Nell, "just a pretty hoop of gold; I must have trampled on it to reach my hero, and somehow I could not bear to do it."

Lil was wide awake now; she sat up in bed, a strangely grave expression on her usually careless face.

"Well, be very careful whom you marry," Nell laughed.

"I don't think I shall ever marry anyone, dear; but why should I need to be more careful about it than other people?"

"Because I believe that dream was sent as a warning. Until you meet your hero you ought not to marry!"

Nell smiled.

"I might go through my whole life without meeting him, you foolish child!"

"Well, I'm quite sure you ought to marry him, and no one else."

Miss Charteris had a long journey before her, so it was necessary for her to leave Minerva House early the next morning, thus there was no time for private talks. She and Lillian had long ago exchanged a promise of constant correspondence—indeed, Lil had a great hope of being allowed to invite her friend on a long visit to Dashleigh Towers—so the parting was not a very dismal one after all; and when Helen was fairly in the train and speeding along in solitude for almost the first time in her life, she had not a single painful memory of the home which had sheltered her for twelve years.

"If only I can always be as happy," was

her thought, as she looked back on those quiet, uneventful years. "If only the Mertons are as kind to me as Mrs. Hamilton, I shall have nothing left to wish for."

It was strange how very little she knew of her new protector. He and Colonel Charteris had been friends for many years, and had fought side by side in the Crimean and Zulu wars. Directly after his comrade's death the Major had come into a large property, and had immediately sold out and married a young wife. His ancestral estate was in Monmouthshire, and after months of foreign travel he and his bride had returned to spend the winter at Merton Park. Here his ward was to join them.

He had written kindly enough to her, but had made not the slightest attempt to see her, and poor Nell was a little afraid she might prove an unwelcome guest to the newly-married pair.

Over her fortune the Colonel had but very partial control. Two able lawyers were associated with him in the trusteeship, and the will decreed that they should have the chief management of the property. Three hundred a-year was to be paid to Major Merton for Miss Charteris's maintenance while she continued beneath his roof, and a further sum of two hundred was assigned for her private expenses. The rest of her fortune accumulated until she came of age or married, when the whole five thousand a-year came into her possession.

But here Colonel Charteris made a mistake. Although he settled the principal summarily on his daughter, there was nothing to prevent her husband from spending every farthing of her income; and he forgot to make any stipulations regarding her guardian's consent to her marriage. As the will unluckily ran, Nell might have married Major Merton's coachman without in the least forfeiting her property. The lawyers had seen this flaw, and striven to amend it, but their client died before a codicil could be drawn up; and it only remained to hope Major Merton and his wife would make Miss Charteris so happy that nothing but a really unexceptionable match should tempt her to leave them.

Something of this Mrs. Hamilton had tried to explain to her favourite pupil, but Nell, so apt a scholar, usually felt bewildered over money affairs.

"Have I no relations?" she asked, absently. "It seems so strange to be so alone in the world!"

"You have cousins, and I should say uncles and aunts; but your father quarrelled with them before he left England."

"I wonder why?"

Mrs. Hamilton could have told her, but she declined.

"Your father was a good man, Helen," she said gently; "he and your mother were one of the happiest couples I ever met. They left you in my charge with only one proviso—you were to pay no visits without their sanction. They wished you never to have made acquaintances outside your school-world when you returned to them. Nell, you may well be proud of your father's memory! He was a weight among men—the truest heart, the noblest soul, I ever met."

"And my mother? I can hardly remember her!"

"Your mother was very lovely," said Mrs. Hamilton, a little evasively. "You are like her sometimes, only not so pretty."

Nell sighed.

"If she had only lived!"

And now, aged nineteen, with lessons left behind her, and school-life ended, Miss Helen Charteris was on her way to take up her position as a young lady of fortune. Her guardian's wife was the person about whom her curiosity was most aroused.

Nell felt instinctively that her happiness, or the reverse, depended chiefly on Mrs. Merton, and she knew nothing about her, but had a vague idea she was many years younger than her husband.

Chepstow Station at last. It was five o'clock, and, as Nell was quite tired of travelling, it was a real relief to feel her destination was gained, and she stepped on to the platform a little nervous and lonely, but very glad to find herself once more upon her feet.

"I am sure you are Miss Charteris!"

Nell started. A little figure had come up to her, a slight, childish-looking creature, with the face of a China shepherdess, star-like blue eyes, pink cheeks, and a profusion of flaxen hair. She was dressed from head to foot in velvet trimmed with fur, and she made the prettiest little picture imaginable, as she stood there holding out her hand.

"Yes," said Nell, her face lighting up, "I am. Did Mrs. Merton send you to meet me?"

The small apparition in velvet laughed.

"My dear child, I quite forgot to introduce myself. I am Isola Merton, and I am very pleased to see you at last."

She told a man to look after the luggage, and led the way to the carriage. She had very winning, childish ways, but she looked as unlike the wife of a middle-aged officer as could well be imagined.

"I am so glad you've come!" she said, gently. "You see, the Major and I got frightened; we thought maybe you'd turn out a strong-minded young lady, with a belief in 'Women's Rights,' and that sort of thing. You stayed at school so long, the Major thought you must be terribly clever."

Nell laughed.

"I stayed at school because I had no home to go to; and I don't think, Mrs. Merton, you can possibly have been more frightened of me than I have been of you."

"Well, I am sure we shall be very happy together. Merton Park is a very nice place, and the Major will get you a horse."

"Have you been home long, Mrs. Merton?"

"Six weeks. We stayed abroad a whole year; the Major wanted me to look older and wiser before I took my place as mistress of the Park; but when twelve months had passed, and I still looked just the same, he gave it up as a bad job, and we came home. I'm as happy as the day is long. I have the best husband in the world, Miss Charteris; and I will try and find you the next best."

"Oh, pray don't!"

"Oh, yes, I shall! You are much too nice for an old maid. I married when I was barely eighteen, and I had a father and mother, besides hosts of brothers and sisters, to tempt me to stay at home."

"They must miss you very much?"

Isola smiled.

"There were too many of us, you know; we wanted thinning out, as the gardeners say of their plants sometimes."

They were at the Park now, and its master, a grave, soldierly man, stood on the threshold of the stately mansion to welcome his ward. Somehow, as Nell put her little hand in his, she felt a sense of security and peace which Isola's greeting, kind as it was, had failed utterly to give; there was a suspicious moistness about the Major's eyes.

"My poor child, I wonder you don't hate me for being here, while your poor father's sleeping in an Indian grave; but we'll do our best to make his daughter happy, won't we, Isla?"

Isla had vanished: the introduction once performed, she had slipped away.

"She's a pretty young creature," said the Major, half appealingly, to Miss Charteris. "I hope you and she will be good friends, Helen."

"I am sure we shall; Mrs. Merton seems to me to be kindness itself."

"And you think you can be happy in a quiet country place?"

"I am sure I can. You know I have never been anywhere, except at school, since I can remember. Everything will be fresh and new to me."

"And in two or three months' time, you know, we shall be going up to town, and you

must be presented to the Queen at the first drawing-room next season."

"You will tire her to death," said a gay voice near them, and Isola returned, her wraps removed, and her small self arrayed in an exquisite evening dress. "Miss Charteris, let me show you your rooms and the maid I have engaged for you."

The rooms were charming—three pretty apartments en suite, fitted up as bed-room, dressing-room, and study.

In the second a young woman knelt, uncording Nell's boxes. She was about thirty, scrupulously neat and respectable—in fact, the very model of a maid, experienced servant; but wilful Nell took a dislike to her at first sight. The woman was of one of those complexions best described by the term "whitby brown," her eyebrows and lashes were so faint as to be invisible; her eyes themselves were small and fidget-like; for the rest, hair, complexion, and lips were all of the tint before mentioned. She was small and thin in figure, moved with a noiseless step, and had altogether sufficient feline traits to make her surname of "Cat" more appropriate than was desirable.

She rose and curteyed to her new mistress. Nell was conscious of shivering.

Mrs. Merton gave Lydia a few directions, and then left Miss Charteris to her toilet.

She found that the maid, if unattractive, was thoroughly *au fait* at her duties.

In a very few moments Nell was dressed with more effect than she had ever before displayed in her toilet.

Then Lydia ushered her with great respect downstairs to the drawing-room, where she said the mistress would be found.

Mrs. Merton sat in a low chair by the fire. She welcomed Nell with a smile.

"Come and have a talk with me. It wants a quarter of an hour to dinner-time; they won't come near us till the bell rings."

"Have you any visitors?" asked Miss Charteris, wondering a little at the pronoun.

"My brother is staying here. Dear Rex! he only came two days ago, that we might spend Christmas together before he went abroad."

"Will he be gone long?" asked Nell, trying to feel interested.

"All his life; he is going to make his fortune. You see, papa is not rich, and there are more than a dozen of us, so some must turn out in the world."

"Is he your favourite brother?"

"Yes, though there is a great gap between us. Rex was eight-and-twenty last week."

"Is he a soldier?"

Isola shook her head.

"He is a poet. He writes the most glorious things that the critics were jealous of him, and would not notice his genius; and, you see, he can't live on his genius, so he is going to Australia to breed sheep."

Nell's private opinion was that there were many employments more suitable for a rejected poet than sheep-breeding; but she said nothing of this to her hostess.

"Rex is a dear fellow," went on Mrs. Merton, "but so unfortunate; it really seems as if whatever he touched went wrong. I love him all the better for his ill-luck."

"Could not the Major get him some post at home?"

"I make it a rule never to trouble my husband about my relations; and, besides, he doesn't like poor Rex. My husband has all his life been a successful man, so I suppose he can't be expected to sympathise with failure."

The door opened and they entered together, the "successful man" and the "failure."

Nell decided no brother and sister had ever been more unlike than Mr. Travers and Mrs. Merton.

He had been described already. The poet was a tall, fine-looking man, six foot odd, with black, curling hair, and large, flashing black eyes, which had a trace of *diablerie* in their fire.

He was faultlessly dressed; from the set of

his white tie to his silk socks there was nothing about him to suggest poverty, and the Major's manner to him was perfectly courteous, albeit it lacked that ring of cordiality which had sounded in his voice as he welcomed Nell.

"Helen, Mr. Reginald Travers, one of my wife's brothers—Travers, my ward, Miss Charteris."

Then the gong sounded, and they went in to dinner—an exquisitely-served repast. Four people, who were all disposed to be amiable, little wonder that the meal passed off very sociably, and that when Nell followed Mrs. Merton to the drawing-room, she decided her lines had fallen in very pleasant places.

The Major sat over his wine, but Mr. Travers soon followed the ladies.

"Are you swearing an eternal friendship?" he asked, smiling. "Miss Charteris, I ought to warn you this sister of mine is the most *exigeant* person in the world. I have been her bond slave for a good many years, and I assure you you had better be careful lest you fall into the same captivity."

"I am not afraid."

"Iza, after that compliment you ought to give us some music."

She rose and went to the piano. Rex sat down by Miss Charteris, and amused her so well she felt quite sorry when the arrival of the Major and coffee broke up the *tête-à-tête*.

"Only another day of quiet, and the house will be turned topsy-turvy, Nell," said Major Merton, blithely. "Fancy twenty people coming to spend Christmas with an old Indian like me! It's quite gratifying!"

"I would much rather they stayed away," said his wife, a little pitiably. "I am sure we four should be much cosier without them."

"It will be right for Helen to see a little of the world; and Iza, I wish you didn't dislike your neighbours quite so much."

"They are horrible."

"Good well-meaning people."

"As antiquated as though they had just stepped out of Noah's ark. There, don't fret yourself, dear old man; I mean to be as polite and deferential as though I were delighted to see them."

"Is Vernon coming?"

Nell felt positive she saw a look of intelligence exchanged between Mrs. Merton and her brother before the former answered.—

"No Jim, he is still abroad; Lady Decima told me she had no idea when he would be home; I said she must come to us alone."

"Quite right. I have a great regard for Lady Decima and her son."

"I like her extremely," said Iza. "I haven't a chance of liking her son, since he has been away ever since we came home."

After a little more conversation, Nell went upstairs; Lydia undressed her, and was dismissed. Then the girl stood for a moment, thinking of all the strange events of the day. She wondered if her bedroom faced the grounds, and what they were like. The soft moonlight was as bright as day, and Nell drew up the blind for a moment to look out upon the prospect.

She started. Her window looked out upon a broad flower-garden, and beyond stretched the park, full and broad, beautiful even now in the depths of winter, lovely beyond expression in summer; but it was not the beauty of the scene which made Nell start. She saw two figures in eager conversation, almost just beneath her window—indeed, she could hardly discern their faces, but the figures were enough for her to recognise those of Mrs. Merton and her brother.

She had left her guardian's wife declaring she was so sleepy she could hardly keep her eyes open. She had heard Mr. Travers assert he must go to his own room to write important letters, yet here they were in earnest conversation!

Very gently Nell threw open the window, and would have scorned to listen, but she wanted to convince herself she was mistaken. She longed to believe these were not the two she thought them.

Doubt was impossible. She could recognise the fur trimming of Isola's mantle; she could even hear Mr. Travers's clear voice.

"There's no pleasing you, child!" he was saying, irritably. "I am sure I did my best!"

"You acted your part too well!"

"Surely, Isa, you can't be idiot enough to think that I—"

She interrupted him.

"I think nothing, only you acted your part too well. You must have mistaken your profession."

"I meant to please you."

"Then you do care a little for my wishes?"

"Should I be here else?"

"Oh, Rex! didn't you shudder when you heard what the Major said of Sir Guy?"

"Not I! I knew the man was abroad."

"But if he comes back?"

"He won't yet awhile. Besides, you need not receive him unless you like."

"I must. You don't know, Jim; he is true as steel; when he takes a fancy to any one he will go through fire and water to show his friendship. When Sir Guy comes home he will be here perpetually."

"It's no use anticipating troubles. Isa, it's getting late; you'd better go to bed."

"I'm not tired."

"You ought to be, and you'll have to be up early to-morrow to entertain your husband's ward."

"What did you think of her, Rex?"

"I never think at all!"

"But tell me!"

"I think I was sorry for her; she is such a child you see, Isa—such a mere child!"

Nell shut the window with a jerk, and crept into bed sorrowful and perplexed. What did it all mean? Why did Mrs. Merton and her brother steal out into the grounds by moonlight? Why did they fear Sir Guy Vernon? And why, oh, why did Mr. Travers pity her?

Oh! how Nell wished herself back at Minerva House—how she longed for Lillian Forrester!

Lil's clear judgment would have seen through this seeming mystery. Child as she was—a whole year younger than Nell—she would have penetrated the secret, and assured herself of what so puzzled her friend. Nell was fairly worn out, when sleep at last came to her wearied eyes.

And yet, despite the anxiety and tumult of her last waking thoughts, when she was once asleep she slumbered as peacefully and calmly as a little child, and she did not wake until the winter sunshine was trying to peep into the room through the drawn curtains, and the maid Lydia stood at her side with a cup of coffee.

"Half-past eight, ma'am. Breakfast will be in an hour. Mistress thought, perhaps, you would prefer not getting up."

"Oh! I would much rather get up. I want to see the park. Is it a fine morning?"

"Beautiful, ma'am."

Half-an-hour sufficed for Nell's toilet. Equipped in a warm serge dress, a black jacket and hat, she went out into the grounds in a far more cheerful mood than could have been expected from her last waking thoughts the night before. Looked at in the clear light of day her fancies faded; all that had so puzzled her was capable of an easy explanation.

Mrs. Merton, years younger than her husband, loved her brother dearly, and took his part in any differences that arose. The Major, a little put out at this, did not give them many opportunities for *tête-à-têtes*, and so they resorted to the innocent expedient of a meeting in the grounds. As to Sir Guy that was easier still. No doubt he had been in love with Mrs. Merton (she was quite pretty enough to have had half-a-dozen lovers), and with womanly reserve she shrank from a meeting with her rejected suitor—it was all natural enough.

"I must have been a simpleton to be so frightened last night," soliloquised Nell. "I do believe I am getting almost as superstitious

as Margaret Dean herself. Well, I understand it all now, and I mean to be as happy as possible here. I believe when people have met with a great many disappointments themselves they always fancy other people are going to do the same, so that's why Mr. Travers pitied me. I wonder when he is going to Australia?"

"Good morning, Miss Charteris!"

Nell started. Here was the object of her thoughts confronting her in an irreproachable tweed suit. What, oh! what would Mr. Travers do for a tailor when he was on a sheep farm, hundreds of miles "up-country" in the Antipodes!

"Good morning!" said Nell, politely. "I was just going round the park. Do you think I shall have time before breakfast?"

He took out his watch.

"Only ten minutes, and the Major is a martinet for punctuality. I'm afraid you must put off your ramble till after breakfast. I shall be very happy to escort you then. I don't expect Isa will venture; she always writes letters for the Major in the library the first thing."

"How well you know their ways!"

"You see, Isa and I are great friends."

"Is she your favourite sister?"

"Yes."

"And how many others have you?"

"I don't know. Don't look so shocked, Miss Charteris. I believe there are a baker's dozen of us somewhere, but I never took the trouble to count up!"

"You don't deserve to have them!"

"Perhaps not."

"Now if I had even one brother or sister—"

"You would probably be very sorry."

"I should be delighted. Everything would seem so different to me!"

"Precisely. You would no longer be an heiress!"

"As if I minded that. Lil and I often used to say we should enjoy being poor."

"And who is Lil?"

"The dearest friend I have in the world."

"But hasn't she a name?"

"Oh, yes. Lady Lillian Forrester. But I always think of her as Lil."

"I used to think her very pretty."

"Do you know her?" eagerly.

"I used to visit at Lord Dashleigh's. Oh! no," as Nell began to talk of telling her friend of the coincidence; "you must not mention it to her. She was only a child then, and she will have forgotten."

"Lil never forgets!"

"I must ask you, as a favour, never to mention my name to Lady Lillian, or any member of her family. I may be poor and unsuccessful, Miss Charteris—I daresay Isola has told you as much—but I have my pride; and I do not choose to have it said that I boast of my acquaintance with titled people."

"You are awfully proud!"

"Awfully. I suppose you think I ought not to be—that pride is a luxury beyond the deserts of poor people. Eh, Miss Charteris?"

"I never thought of such a thing."

"Well, here we are at the house. You are not angry with me, I hope, Miss Charteris? Believe me, I would not willingly offend you."

"I am not offended."

"And we are friends?"

"Isn't it too soon to say that?"

"No!" said Rex, fiercely. "Anyone can tell at once whether another person is congenial to them or not. Promise me we are friends."

And Nell promised it, as she went into breakfast, meeting a warm greeting from the Major and a very slight frown from his wife, which disappeared almost before she noticed it.

"I have a woful headache," said Mrs. Merton, after breakfast. "I shall have to leave you to Rex for amusement this morning; he will show you round the park."

"Can't I sit with you, and bathe your head?"

Isola thanked her, and declined.

"I am almost past speaking. The Major is going to drive into Chepstow, and if you two amuse each other, I shall have nothing to think of till lunch."

There was no refusing after such a way of putting it. Nell wandered through the park and grounds at Mr. Travers's side. He was a man of great intellect and rare fascination. Almost without effort he made the time fly for Nell. The little unsophisticated schoolgirl had never enjoyed herself so much.

"Come up here," said Rex, pointing to a small flight of steps leading to an observatory built on rising ground; "you can see almost every place of note in the neighbourhood from here."

It was a lovely view, indeed, which spread itself before Nell's enchanted eyes. One dwelling in the distance charmed her more than all—a stately pile of grey stone half covered by ivy.

"What house is that?"

He looked, and an angry scowl passed over his handsome face.

"That is Vernon Grange, the property of the greatest prig in the county. Guy Vernon, Baronet!"

"Don't you like him?"

"I hate him!"

"But why?"

"I don't know. We were at college together, and he won every honour I lost. That may have something to do with it!"

"But that would be jealousy!"

"Well!"

"And jealousy is so mean!"

"Is it? Don't you think you would ever, under any circumstances, be jealous? There, Miss Charteris!"

"I don't think so!"

"Then you are a perfect character?"

"Oh, no! Only jealousy has no attractions for me. If a person didn't care for me I should be too proud to be jealous of whoever they preferred to me!"

"Ah!"

"Is Mrs. Merton subject to these headaches? She looks to me terribly delicate!"

"I don't think so. Isola is very excitable, and then she gets easily upset."

"She is very pretty?"

"Aye!"

They spoke not another word until they reached home. Both the Major and his wife were in the dining-room when they appeared. Isola, all smiles and brightness, had lost all traces of her headache, and the Major was full of the trifling pieces of news he had picked up in the small country town.

"By the way, Isa," he said, suddenly, "our party won't lose its greatest attraction after all. I met Lady Decima to-day in Chepstow, and she had had a telegram from Sir Guy saying he will be at the Grange to-night, so we may expect them both to-morrow!"

Mrs. Merton had been all smiles when her husband began to speak. Nell, who sat next her, saw her face change at the name of Vernon; that she gave a little cry, and before the Major had realized anything was wrong, his idolized wife had fallen fainting on the ground.

(To be continued.)

WILKIE drew his first pictures with a burnt stick on a barn door. Benjamin West made his first brushes out of hairs from the cat's tail. Ferguson made a map of the heavenly bodies by lying on his back in the fields and holding between his eye and the sky a thread of silk on which little beads were strung, and Franklin's implements were a kite and a key. With these he taught men the use of electricity, while Dr. Black discovered latent heat with a pan of water and two thermometers.

BOUND NOT TO MARRY.

CHAPTER XIX.

ONCE AGAIN.

ELEANOR made her way to the terrace overlooking the West Heath, thinking she would probably find it sufficiently sheltered to be able to sit on one of the garden seats, under the trees, where she could read, or gaze on the pleasant stretch of heath and country that would lie before her.

But when she got there she discovered her mistake. The wind was keen and cutting, though the sun shone brightly, and after sitting still but for a very few minutes, she felt slightly chilled.

She rose, and descended the slopes, making her way to the north side of the Heath, where she thought she would find more shelter.

Twenty minutes' walk brought her to the north side of Leg of Mutton Pond, and now she began to go more leisurely, for she did not feel the wind; the sunshine was bright and warm, and she thoroughly enjoyed the wintry tints of the vegetation and the calm beauty of the landscape.

She was no longer inclined to read, but she paced to and fro on the long winding path, sheltered from the cold wind, by the rising ground on her side, and she lost herself in dreams of the past, rather than in anticipations of the future.

There are always people about on Hampstead Heath, and there are a certain number of policemen and keepers who look shrewdly after every blade of grass and scrap of bloom, and before whose eyes to pluck the most innocent-looking daisy is a crime.

In a place so well preserved against depredation, every human being might be supposed to be free from insult and outrage; and therefore, when a man, with a villainous cast of countenance, came to Eleanor, and began in a half whining, half threatening tone to ask her for money, she said truthfully,

"I have none to give; I left my purse at home."

Still the man continued to demand assistance, and he stood before the lady and would not let her pass, while his eyes fastened upon a narrow gold bracelet which she wore on her left wrist.

"I tell you I have no money with me, and if I had I should not give it to you after your insolence," she said, indignantly.

And she attempted to pass him, but he barred her way, and began to utter words that shocked and horrified her, while he made a snatch at her bracelet.

But the gold clasp resisted his efforts to wrench it open, and Eleanor with a terrified glance around, shrieked as loudly as she could for help.

The man's threats were fearful, but he was nervous, for though no one appeared to be near, there were many people in the distance, and the lady's shrieks might be heard by some of them, while it was quite certain that any violent struggle would be observed.

He tried to drag her towards some trees, but she resisted his efforts, shrieking meanwhile; then he tried to pull her down, the more conveniently to rob her, but Eleanor was not a small weak woman, and terror gave her more than natural strength, so that the ruffian felt that he had met with no easy prey.

The struggle had lasted only a few seconds, but to the terrified girl it seemed to have been protracted for hours, and still no help was at hand; and the man's threats were so horrible that the one overwhelming desire in her terrified soul, was to get away from him just long enough to reach the pond and fling herself into the water.

All hope of escape had resolved itself into that one wild desire for death as a refuge from further outrage.

But though the moments had been leaden-

footed to Eleanor, they had passed swiftly enough to the man who had assaulted her, and every instant made his own position more dangerous.

Though he did not stop to look for them, he felt sure that men from a distance were already hastening to the rescue, and that if he did not promptly escape he would inevitably make the acquaintance of the inside of a prison cell, and he now almost dislocated the lady's wrist in his efforts to get possession of that bracelet; and he tried to tear open her tight-fitting jacket to get hold of her watch—a proceeding that, coupled with his threats, only added to her frantic terror.

Just as she is wild with fright, and is fighting madly to get away from him to rush to the pond, and seek refuge in the muddy water, a shout, close at hand, startles the ruffian, and the next instant a well-aimed blow in the face sends him sprawling on the ground, while a strong arm clasps the trembling girl, and a voice that fills her heart with gladness says in reassuring tones,—

"Don't be frightened, darling—no one can hurt you now!"

She clung to him, completely unnerved.

Was it always to be thus? Was this man whom she loved her guardian angel, always at hand to save her, when but for him she would be past saving?

The very question had in it, to her mind, a kind of awe, for it seemed as though the hand of Providence was drawing them together, spite of all obstacles; and she leaned her head upon Hugh Darrel's shoulder, while his arm encircled her trembling form, and kept her from falling.

Meanwhile there were sounds in the air that clearly warned the desperado that he had not a moment to lose if he would be not be caught, and he sprang to his feet, looked sharply about him, and then darted off swiftly as a hare in the direction of North End.

Some of those who had come to the rescue followed him; others, and among the latter a policeman, spoke to Eleanor, and asked what had happened.

She answered as well as she could, showing her bruised wrist and her torn dress, the ruffian having wrenched off many of the buttons of her jacket in his attempt to steal her watch.

Then she gave her name and address in case the man were caught, and taking Hugh Darrel's arm as naturally as though it belonged to her, she started to walk home.

But her strength was not equal to the task. So great had been her terror that the reaction completely prostrated her, and it was with difficulty that she could be got to the nearest road, where a cab was procured, in which Hugh took her home.

Mrs. Pritchard's surprise may be imagined when she saw the cab containing the young couple drive up to the door; but her pleasure at seeing Hugh again was speedily turned to anxiety when she perceived how white and limp Eleanor appeared, and how tenderly the gentleman assisted her to alight and to walk into the house.

She hastened to the door to meet them, and asked anxiously what had happened, but Eleanor was still too much agitated to tell her, and Hugh could only say,—

"She has been greatly frightened, and her wrist is injured!"

And he supported her into the drawing-room, where a large fire was burning, and, having placed her in a low chair, he began to examine the bruised and swollen wrist.

"I think you had better send for a doctor," he said at length, turning to Mrs. Pritchard. "I don't think the injury is serious, but it is always best to be on the safe side."

"Certainly. I will send at once!" said the lady, and she left the room to do so, while Eleanor could scarcely control her nerves, so excited and hysterical did she feel.

"Poor child!" said Hugh, bending and kissing her pale cheeks. "I think I had better leave you for awhile; but I must come

again! You will not refuse to see me—will you?"

"No; come to dinner this evening," she answers in a low tone, while she still seems to feels his kiss tingling upon her cheeks. "I shall be better then."

He presses her hand to his lips just as Mrs. Pritchard re-enters the room; then he takes his leave, feeling that his presence may be a certain restraint to them.

In this he is right, for, as soon as he is gone, Eleanor retires to her own room, and falls into the nearest approach to a fit of hysteria that she has ever experienced.

The doctor comes and bandages her wrist, gives her a soothing draught, and prescribes quiet and freedom from any excitement, and when he is gone, the overstrung girl lies on her couch and tries to sleep.

For a time she is unsuccessful, but after a while the draught has its effect, and she sleeps long and dreamlessly, and wakes a little after five in the afternoon to find that the daylight has nearly gone.

At first she wonders why she is here. Then she fancies that her fright on the Heath and her rescue by Mr. Hughes is but a dream; but the pain in her wrist soon convinces her that the assault upon her was real enough, and that what followed afterwards must also have taken place.

Was she glad or sorry? She could not tell.

In one sense she was supremely happy. This she could not fail to be, knowing as she now did past all doubt that the man she loved—loved her!

"But what was to come of it? How was it to end?" she asked herself, and there was no one sufficiently acquainted with all the circumstances of the case to answer the questions.

It is not often that a woman troubles herself with such questions as these, unless there is some grave, social or legal obstacle to her union with the man of her choice.

But Eleanor Rosevear was placed in an exceptional position.

Old Miss Darrel had from the time that Eleanor first remembered her, expressed her strong disapproval of matrimony, and, like Queen Bess, she had always viewed with disfavour the marriage of any of her dependents or friends.

It is true that she had wished to marry Eleanor to her nephew, but that had merely been to give both of them the benefit of her fortune without dividing it, and not because she expected them to be deeply in love with each other.

She had tried, and tried in vain, to extort a promise from the child of her adoption to the effect that she would never marry any man but Hugh Darrel, and though Eleanor had resisted this, yet so firmly had it been impressed upon her mind, that this was her only mode of escape from a single life, that it needed not the will of her benefactress to make her certain that she was "Bound not to Marry."

This impression was stronger upon her than many people would imagine.

And then, again, there were the material disadvantages that would beset her marriage with Mr. Hughes. Poverty is comparative, and a poor gentleman may have a much larger income and yet be in direr straits than any poor labouring man, and Eleanor had all her life been educated to have a wholesome dread of poverty.

That Mr. Hughes was poor—from her point of view—she could not doubt; nay, she was sure of it; and if with her hand she could give him herself and all she now possessed, she would have been right willing to do so. But to go to him empty-handed, as she literally must do, if she went to him at all, would, she reflected, only plunge him in greater difficulties.

The purchase of the house in which she was now living, and the furnishing of it, had swallowed up the greater portion of the money she had already saved out of her income, and

by the surrender of Darrel Court, that income was so far curtailed that she would have to wait a long time before she could save anything that would be worth waiting at all for.

She sighed as she thought of all these things, and the tears started to her eyes, for, look which way she would, difficulties and troubles seemed to surround her.

Prudence might whisper all her words of wisdom in her ears; but when Mr. Hughes proposed—as she had no doubt that he would do—she could not bring herself to refuse him.

Twice had he saved her.

The first time from the jaws of death, the second time from something she firmly believed to be worse than death.

How she had pined for his presence she scarcely dared frankly admit to herself, but she knew that she had not sufficient strength of mind to send him away now he had come, and she had no hesitation in believing that she would rather share poverty with him than wealth with another.

Still, the prospect of poverty had its terrors for her, and a snatch of one of Tom Hood's poems would recur to her mind again and again till she found herself repeating it aloud:—

"Some are littered under a roof,
Neither wind nor waterproof,
That's the press of love in a cottage.
And the whole of their wardrobe wouldn't fetch,
Though Robbins himself drew up the shoth,
The price of a mass of potage."

The prospect for Eleanor thus depicted was not alluring—neither for that matter was a life of single-blessedness.

But when our heroine had reached this stage in her reflections Mrs. Pritchard peeped into the room, and finding her awake, retreated; and a few seconds afterwards she appeared again, Mitcham following her with a tray, upon which was tea, bread and butter, and dry toast.

"I am so glad to see you are better!" said the elder lady, affectionately; "and I am sure you must be hungry, for you have eaten nothing since breakfast; but it is so near dinner-time that I don't know if you would like anything more substantial than this."

"No, thank you, this will do nicely," she answers, sleepily. "I am going to get up and dress directly; Mr. Hughes is coming to dinner!"

"Does cook know?" asks the companion, in something like alarm.

"No; she cannot know, because I forgot to tell anyone," replied the young lady; "and I have forgotten what I ordered for dinner!"

"I will go and speak to cook myself!" said Mrs. Pritchard, with decision. "A gentleman must have a good dinner! I have had some experience in such matters! I will return directly!"

When she did come back to Eleanor she found her under the hands of her maid. The gas was lighted in the room, the gas fire was burning in the grate, the brass brazier, supported by massive pillars, shone like gold, and the glass in the doors of the wardrobe, the duchesse table, and the overmantel reflected all the brightness back again, making the Persian carpet, the rich hangings, the furniture of inlaid satin wood, and the toilette-wares of white and gold, present an appearance of luxury such as only wealth and good taste combined could produce.

All the luxuriant appointments of the room struck Eleanor to-night, as they had never impressed her before.

There was a contrast between her present surroundings, and the love in a cottage described by the author of the "Song of the Shirt," and she wondered if it were possible for any approach to such misery as he described to be her portion in life.

The dread of this spectre poverty haunted her, though she tried hard to drive it away, and she paid no heed to the fashion in which

her maid wound the thick coils of her dark golden hair round her shapely head.

She was thinking of other things, wondering whether it would be best for Hughes to take her portionless, as she would be, or to go away and never see her again; and she answered so vaguely the question as to what dress she would wear that Mitcham, taking advantage of her absence of mind, and wishing to show a new dress, which had come home the day previously would look, quietly took it out of the box, and put it on her young lady.

It was black, the material being satin and lace, but the whole of the front of the skirt was embroidered in raised flowers and leaves with fine bugles, the whole effect being perfectly dazzling, as the gaslight fell upon the glittering jet.

Not until she had it on did Eleanor observe what it was she wore, and then she said, wearily,—

"Oh! I had not meant to wear this; it is too good, except for a special occasion!"

"I'm sure you've not got a dress that suits you half so well, miss!" protested Mitcham, lost in admiration; "and it's all black, miss, and you don't look overdressed—not one bit."

"I am too tired to change it," was the answer.

Then she sighed, as she remembered that this gown had cost as much as she would be justified in spending in a whole year on dress if she married a poor, struggling artist.

But all these troublesome thoughts took unto themselves wings when a servant came to tell her that Mr. Hughes was in the drawing-room; and with a flushed cheek and a loudly-beating heart, she went down to meet him.

Mrs. Pritchard discreetly remained in her own room until the song for dinner sounded. Perhaps she thought, under the circumstances, her absence would be more appreciated than her company.

CHAPTER XX.

TOO LATE.

WHEN Mrs. Pritchard reached the dining-room her experienced eyes at once told her that nothing like a mutual understanding had as yet been arrived at between the young couple.

Mr. Hughes, though charming and courteous as ever, was just a little nervous, and Miss Rosemary was unusually silent.

They neither of them ate much, and full justice was not done to the good dinner which she had been careful to have provided.

The presence of the servants was rather a relief than otherwise, and when they had gone Mrs. Pritchard made heroic efforts to keep up an animated conversation, but she met with such signal failure that it was a satisfaction to all of them when Eleanor rose from table and the ladies left the room.

It was quite certain that Mr. Hughes would not be long in following them, and the companion ordered tea to be brought up at once, so that her own absence immediately afterwards might not seem in any way peculiar.

Eleanor seated herself in the corner of a couch that was drawn up close to the fire, and remained silently watching the glowing embers which burnt with a blue frosty glow.

She was sitting here, slightly expectant, though feeling sure of what was coming; but there was a sadness in her heart, probably produced by the consciousness that in accepting any man but Hugh Darrel as a husband, she would be returning base ingratitude for the love and care and boundless generosity which had been lavished upon her by the eccentric old lady, who had taken the place of her dead mother.

"In all honour and justice I am bound to marry Hugh Darrel—whom I never will marry if he asks me—or not to marry at all," she sighs.

And she does not observe that Mrs. Pritchard

has left the room, and that Mr. Hughes has just entered.

He comes forward quietly, takes a seat by her side, and she looks at him with a momentary expression of fear which makes him say tenderly,—

"You are still suffering from your fright this morning, my poor darling? The wretch that assaulted you deserves hanging."

She smiles faintly, and asks with some interest,—

"How did you happen to be at Hampstead this morning? It seems so strange that you should come to my rescue a second time!"

"I came to Hampstead to see you," he answered, smiling. "Your lawyer would not give me your address, and I did not know where to find you, until Rowe saw you by chance the other day, and at once sent to me."

"The traitor!" responded Eleanor, with a laugh; "though I suppose, under all the circumstances, I ought to be grateful to him."

"I am grateful to him," said Hughes, earnestly; "but I want you to tell me something. Why did you hide yourself from me? Had I said or done anything to offend you?"

For a few seconds Eleanor did not reply. She was conscious that she had felt hurt and indignant, but it was difficult in so many words to explain why and therefore, and when she did regain her voice it was so vague,

"I don't know. I think I was not quite pleased with you."

"What had I done?" he asked, anxiously. "No intention was further from my mind than to give you offence. What did I say? When did it happen? Tell me, that I may explain and do penance."

"It is not worth repeating. It might have been my fancy," she said, evasively; "and it was not altogether your words and manner that decided me, but there are circumstances connected with myself which made me think it would be best for us not to meet."

"Let us talk of ourselves, not of our circumstances," he says, with fervour; "we can talk of these later on. I love you, Eleanor. I loved you from the first moment that I saw you at Harwich. I followed you unwillingly to Dovercourt, but I did follow. There I tried to avoid meeting you or knowing you; but destiny was too strong for me. Now, though you have tried to hide yourself from me, we meet again, and it is for you to say whether we shall spend our lives together—loving and being loved—or part, never to meet again?"

She had dropped her head till the last few words were uttered; but they startled her, made her look up suddenly with a gasp of terror as she echoed the word,—

"Part!"

"No, there can be no parting between us!" he cries, ecstatically. "Mine mine forever!" and he clasps her in his arms, and their lips meet in the first warm kiss of love.

Their conversation after this is not very lucid. His arm clasps her slender waist and her head rests on his shoulder, while their voices scarcely rise above a murmur, but sound like the cooing of a couple of doves, speaking a language intelligible for the moment to no one but themselves.

There were difficulties and trials ahead for both of them, and they were dimly conscious of this even in the middle of their bliss; but they put all obstacles aside, and closed their eyes to everything but their happiness for the time-being.

Neither of them had ever known the power of love and its intoxicating joy until this hour. They had not frizzled their hearts away and blunted their feelings in little flirtations: to both of them, to love once was to love always and for ever; and the immensity of the new world in which they had now entered together cast a glamour over the present, and blinded them to the future.

The minutes of this evening passed all too swiftly to these newly-plighted lovers, and the hands of the clock were pointing to half-past ten before Hugh Darrel realised that, in a

Andy's house where early hours were kept, it would be considered time to go.

He said something about his not being tired, but he had not risen to go when Mrs. Pritchard, after making an unusual noise with the handle of the door, came into the room and joined them.

She had shut herself up in her own room for a good two hours; and having come to the conclusion that, if Mr. Hughes had not proposed during that time he never would do so, she prudently returned to the lovers, to keep the servants from talking.

Besides, it was time for him to go, and if Eleanor and he were forgetful of Mrs. Grundy, Mrs. Pritchard had much too sincere a respect for that mythical matron to allow her prejudices to be ignored, or her opinion to be set at naught.

She came into the room now as though she had only been absent a few minutes, and she slightly yawned, remarking, sleepily,—

"I have been writing letters."

Then, with a sudden glance at the clock, she exclaimed, with well-feigned surprise,—

"Dear me, how late it is! There is something I had forgotten!"

Then she again left the room, giving Hugh an opportunity of saying "good-night" without the presence of a third person.

How he had sped in his wooing was evident enough to Mrs. Pritchard, but she wisely refrained from making any comment; it would all be told to her in good time, she felt assured; and, meanwhile, Eleanor's happiness was too great for words, and she submitted, rather than responded, to the embrace with which her lover left her.

The next morning brought no diminution of contentment to Eleanor, but she remembered that she had not told Mr. Hughes anything about the peculiar position in which she was placed, and she likewise recollects that he had hinted that he had something to tell her which she might consider of importance.

That any revelation that could now be made would have power to separate them she did not for a moment suppose, and therefore she was in no way anxious as to the result of the serious conversation that she knew must take place.

Her own mind was made up with regard to the future.

In poverty or wealth, in sickness or health, she was prepared to stand by the side of the man she loved, and share his fortunes with him. Yet, there was still a little bitterness in her cup.

She had given up Darrel Court out of no favour to the Darrels, but simply as an act of justice; and now the rest of the wealth that had been left to her under such an unnatural condition would go to enrich the man whom—in consequence of his mother's harshness—she had been accustomed to regard as her natural enemy.

This thought was very galling to her, but there was no help for it, and Mrs. Darrel and her son might triumph over her, as they undoubtedly would; but Eleanor consoled herself with the reflection that she would have one to guard and protect her whose love was more precious than anything else in the world.

In this manner she nursed her love and her resentment side by side, never dreaming for an instant that the same individual was the object of both.

As if by mutual consent, the disagreeable explanations which both of them knew to be inevitable were put off day after day, and the lovers numbed themselves in the presence of each other, and looked forward to meeting, and dreaded parting as though they had been the most love-sick boy and girl living in Arcadia where marriage portions and large incomes need never be considered.

But a time came when matters could no longer drift on in this delightful and easy fashion.

To begin with, Eleanor had wondered, and felt vexed that her lover had not given her a ring of engagement.

True that he once said that he would bring her a ring—a family jewel which he would like her always to wear—but afterwards he seemed to forget it; and thus some weeks went by, and it was a letter from Mr. Merton, the lawyer, asking some questions about the property which he held in trust, that brought matters between the lovers to a crisis.

It was the last day of the old year when Hugh Darrel came to Frogmore, fully resolved to end this hateful secrecy—to tell Eleanor his real name, and how he came to be known by her only under his professional cognomen. To his surprise she met him with a letter in her hand, and the remark,—

"I am very sorry, dear, it cannot be put off any longer; I must explain to you my actual position. It is a dreadful thing to tell you, but if you marry me you will marry a beggar!"

"You make me think of 'King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid,'" he answers, with an awkward laugh. "But that story is much too romantic to be true!"

"I should not like even the first part of it to be true in our case," she says, gravely, and with a contraction of the brows. "I should not find it easy to forgive a man who deceived me, even when he thought to give me a pleasant surprise!"

"Are you very unforgiving?" he asks, looking at her earnestly, and with some trouble in his eyes.

"I am afraid so," is the reply.

And he turned away, muttering under his breath,—

"Then Heaven help us both!"

A few minutes afterwards he sits down by her side and listens, calmly and patiently, to what is but an old story to him—of how Miss Darrel adopted her on the death of her mother, and brought her up as her own child; and how she had bequeathed her fortune to her for life, or for as long as she remained unmarried.

He asks no questions; and, indeed, shows only a polite interest in her story, except when she speaks of Mrs. Darrel and her son; and then some of the bitterness she feels finds expression, and he looks pained and displeased, as though he felt disappointed with her for cherishing so much resentment.

Seeing this, she tries to justify herself by detailing some of her fancied wrongs; but he says, gravely and sadly,—

"You are mistaken, darling. You have been listening to the talk of servants and to the tongues of mischief-makers. Mrs. Darrel is a woman of strong prejudices, but she is not, by any means, so bad as you depict her; and I know that Hugh Darrel never spoke of you with disrespect, nor thought of you lightly—for I am he!"

"You!" she gasps, looking at him with mingled aversion, love, and dismay. "Are you mad? You cannot be Hugh Darrel!"

"I think you will find that that is my real name," he answers, with a deprecatory smile. "My name, as an artist, is Jack Hughes; but in private life and among my own friends I am John Hugh Darrel; my mother dislikes the name of John, and has always called me Hugh. Now, darling, this is the secret I have waited to tell you. I hope you are not greatly disappointed at finding Fam your *bête noir*?"

She makes no answer; but, as he tries to take her hand, she withdraws it from him.

Her naturally pale face is whiter than usual, and her features have hardened, as though she had suddenly become a block of stone.

He feels, rather than sees this; but he has expected some difficulty, and is not to be easily daunted.

"When I heard your name at the hotel at Harwick," he continues, "I knew who you must be; and, as I told you a little while ago, I followed you to Dovercourt; but I followed you unwillingly, because I, like you, had been prejudiced by those about me."

"You also listened to the 'tattle of ser-

vants!'" she retorted, showing how she had been stung by his ill-chosen expressions.

"Probably I had," he responded, with a humble smile. "But I did not mean to annoy you by that remark."

His humility came too late, and she closed her lips again tightly.

"Yes," he went on, "I followed you, partly because Rowe had arranged that we should do so, and partly because you attracted me in spite of myself!"

"It is a pity that you yielded to the attraction, and did follow me!" she retorted, scornfully; "for then you and I would both of us have been spared this scene!"

"If I had not done so you, at least, would have been spared a good many scenes!" he returned, significantly. "Your life was not worth five minutes' purchase when I dived after you into the sea; and no one else could have reached you in twice that length of time!"

"And you knew then that I was the 'objectionable' girl whom Miss Darrel had adopted?" she asked, looking at him steadily.

"Yes, I knew that you were Miss Rosemary, of Darrel Court; that was why I did not call upon you afterwards," he replied, quietly. "I wished for no thanks at your hands, because I regarded you as my enemy!"

"I suppose I did, and do owe you thanks for saving my life," she replied, slightly softened, but with so much formality in her tone and manner that she chilled him, spite of himself, and he replied, coldly,—

"Pray don't trouble yourself to thank me. I did no more for you than I should have done for any woman in similar circumstances, friend or enemy. But what I wish you now to realise, Eleanor, is this. I have done you no wrong in any way. I have practised no willful deception upon you; many of my friends know me both as Hugh Darrel and as Jack Hughes. By marrying me you will lose nothing. You will be mistress of Darrel Court, and my aunt's private fortune which you now enjoy I will settle upon you. You have admitted that you love me, and you cannot doubt that I love you. Be true to yourself, Eleanor; forget this fanciful resentment that is unworthy of you. If you told me truly, you love me for myself, not for my name, let it be what it may!"

Her heart cried out in response to his appeal, but she stifled its voice.

Pride, resentment, and an obstinacy which but rarely showed itself, made her silent; and when he, thinking she was yielding, took a ring from his finger and tried to put it on the third finger of her left hand, she repulsed him. Not rudely, but with a cold deliberation that sent a chill to his heart, and she rose to her feet, standing before him, tall and stately, and beautiful as any fabled goddess, and she said, with passionless determination,—

"No, thank you. I have said, again and again, I will never marry Hugh Darrel, and I never will!"

Without another word she walks from the room, leaving him alone to realise his rejection.

For a few seconds he is almost speechless with surprise.

It seemed incredible that a woman possessed of even the smallest possible amount of common sense should be ready to sacrifice wealth and position for love, and when she found there need be no such sacrifice, should, from a mere obstinate prejudice, refuse to marry the man whom she professed to love.

Hugh Darrel would have been overwhelmed with grief if he had not felt so indignant. He had believed Eleanor to be so noble, so unselfish, so infinitely superior to the majority of her sex, and now he felt that he could scarcely help despising her.

That she should be so great, and yet so little, was to him incredible; he would have been still more surprised if he had known that she was at this moment locked in her own room, wrestling with her grief and trying

vainly to stifle the love in her heart, while she repeated indignantly,—

"Listen to the tattle of servants! How dare he accuse me of such a thing!"

She was still nursing her wrath when Mrs. Pritchard knocked at the door and begged her to open it, and very reluctantly she complied.

"Here is a note which was brought by a young woman a short time ago, and she begged you would read it at once," said the companion, earnestly.

Eleanor took it without a word, but she was angry at the interruption.

The contents of the note, however, were enough to startle her.

It ran: "Don't let Mr. Hughes leave your house alone to-night; if he does, he is a dead man."

Eleanor read the warning a second time, then she asked hoarsely,—

"Is Mr. Hughes gone?"

"Yes, he left the house as I came upstairs; he must have been gone about five minutes," is the answer.

"Send after him! quick!—quick! Never mind why or wherefore! Say I want him!" she cried, excitedly.

And Mrs. Pritchard ran down to try to do her bidding; but the warning and the repentance were alike too late.

(To be continued.)

A NUMBER of spacious and beautiful white limestone caves have been discovered in Queensland, Australia, about fifteen miles from Rockhampton, in a group of rocky hills. One of the caverns was full of pillars representing Chinese ivory work, according to the explorers; another presented a close resemblance to a cathedral. In one passage between two of the numerous caves the lights carried by the party were put out by the bats which lived there.

REMARKABLE ANTIPATHIES.—Amatus Lusitanus knew a monk who fainted when a rose was shown to him, and while that flower was in bloom was afraid to quit his cell. The celebrated physician Peter d'Apono, could not endure the smell of cheese, and fainted when it was put near him; and there is still, we believe, in existence a treatise on this subject called "De Aversione Casssei," written by Martin Schockins, a professor of philosophy, who also possessed this singular antipathy. Scaliger mentions one of his relations who could not look at a lily, and Montaigne mentions some men who had more dread of apples than of musket balls. The brave and daring Duke of Epernon swooned with terror at the sight of a leveret, although he could look at a hare unmoved. Cæsar d'Abret could not sit at the table on which a sucking-pig was placed, unless, curiously enough to add, its head had been previously removed. Deslandes relates other instances as extraordinary in the *Mercure de France*, one of which was that of a soldier who turned faint whenever linen was cut in his presence. Thomas Hobbes had such a terror of darkness at night that if left in it without a light he would swoon. Tycho Brahe grew sick with terror at the sight of a fox or hare. Bayle was seized with convulsions when he heard the noise of water falling from a rainspout. Zimmerman mentions a lady who would shudder at the touch of silk, satin, or the velvety skin of a peach. Boyle has placed on record the case of a man who had so powerful a dislike of honey, that when it was introduced without his knowledge into a plaster applied to his foot, he immediately detected it, and insisted upon its removal. Julia, a daughter of Frederick, King of Naples, could not taste meat without experiencing dangerous consequences. Scaliger turned pale at the sight of watercresses. Erasmus became feverish when he smelt fish; Henry III. of France swooned at the sight of a cat, and Marshal d'Albert at the presence of a pig.—From "The World of Wonders."

CHANGE.

—o—

THE year successive changes brings,
Roses and snowdrifts, falls and springs;
Life has its alternating hours,
Its withered leaves, its blushing flowers.

The birds, in full and happy tone,
Make vale, and dell, and woodland ring;
We wake one morn to find them gone,
But to return again in spring.

The flower that blooms so radiantly
To-day, will wither soon and die;
But zephyrs in sweet April's train
Will wake the flower to life again.

The heavy cross that bears us down—
Its weight will lessen day by day;
The joy that seems a waiting crown
Will, as we wear it, fade away.

There is no cloud, however drear,
But has a sunbeam waiting near;
And never yet a sky so blue,
But wears, sometimes, a leaden hue.

The years go by, we scarce know how,
Or where the days have lightly flown,
Till silver threads about our brow
Tell us that youth's fair hours are gone.

The world is full of "ups and downs,"
Fortune alternate smiles and frowns;
To-day our hearts are light as air,
To-morrow overcharged with care.

And yet, the world's a happy place,
More hours of hope than of regret—
More mem'ries that we'd ne'er efface
Than those that we would fain forget.

K. C.

THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

—o—

CHAPTER XX.

THE intimacy between Miss Darvall and Mrs. Seymour grew into friendship, and rarely a day passed that did not find the lady and one or two friends at "Bellevue," to lunch, dinner, or afternoon tea, or that did not see Miss Darvall's smart ponies and bells in front of Mrs. Seymour's door.

Mary went to concerts, cricket matches, and reviews, under her new friend's protection, and began to think that it was rather pleasant, after all, to be young, and rich, and pretty!

The depression that had fallen upon her after her foster-mother's death was clearing off, and it was not often now that she wept, when she was alone, to think that she had no relative that she knew of besides her cousin, Benjamin Darvall, and not a friend beyond "Ju" and Humpy!

Ju had paid her a visit about six months after her arrival at Folkestone, and had been made much of by Mrs. Seymour and set; but the spirits Mary had gained Julia had lost. She was dull and silent, and her laugh and gaiety were alike forced. What had come over her?

In answer to Mary's sympathetic inquiries she said that she was miserable—most miserable—at home; that Mrs. Darvall and Captain Burn fought like cat and dog—that her father drank, and there was no use disguising the fact that his temper was at times quite ferocious, and they all trembled before him—that he seemed to get rid of his money in some very mysterious way—betting, she believed; and that the neighbourhood was dropping them as fast as it could! And, oh! how she wished she were back in Australia! How she wished she had never come to England! She wished they had never got rich—that they had always kept to their former station; and she generally wound up all these "wishes" by bursting into tears.

"You have something 'on your mind, behind all this?" Mary would declare. "And when I have told you all my secrets, I think you might tell me yours!"

Then Julia would shake her head and smile a rather ghastly smile, and declare that she had no secret to divulge. On one topic she delivered her mind very freely—and that was on the subject of Mrs. Clare! She would say, for instance,

"Mrs. Seymour I like! She may be a little too fond of admiration and having men dangling after her, but she is true and sincere, and very fond of *you*, Marie—and those Miss Berry's, who are so much with her, are nice girls! But I'll tell you who is a wolf in sheep's clothing—a second Mrs. Martin—only younger and very good-looking; and that's your companion and *chaperon*, Mrs. Clare. I can't bear her!"

This conversation took place in Mary's bedroom, when the house was still and all its inmates were supposed to be asleep, and the two girls were conversing confidentially.

"Why do you say so, Ju?" said Mary, who was binding her hair.

"I took a dislike to her the first time I saw her! She is a spy—a schemer—an artful, selfish woman, who is one of the most deadly flirts I've ever seen!"

"Flirt!" echoed her cousin, in a shocked voice. "Oh, no!"

"Yes! Where are your eyes? She gets hold of eligible, rich, elderly men, and sits behind doors, and whispers behind fans, and says flattering things to them, and horribly spiteful things of other women! I've heard her myself! She is curious about *you*, and asked me a dozen sharp questions about you the day after I came, when we went down to the library together—all in the most innocent and careless manner, of course; but I was equal to her! She asked if you were really my maid once. I said yes, at first; but latterly you were my companion and *confidante*—the same as *she* was to you!" That was nasty one for her, was it not?"

"And what did she say to that?"

"Tossed her head and said, 'She was your chaperon, but never your *confidante*!'

"And never will be!" said Mary, with compressed lips.

"She watches you and me like a sign! I see her eyes gazing at us when we think she is reading, and even inspecting us over her teacup of a morning—nothing escapes her!"

"I wonder what she expects to find out?" said Mary.

"I'm sure I cannot say! When she saw you poring over the *Army and Navy Gazette* at the library yesterday, of course I knew what you were reading about. She snatched it up the moment you laid it down, and read the two pages carefully over. I saw her."

"And I don't think she was much wiser, do you?"

"She is good enough to watch me, too, and to examine my letters as they lie on the hall-table! I saw her take them up, one by one, as I looked over the banisters. I hate these sly, suspicious people! And she takes so much on her! Orders the carriage, presses people to come to lunch—and so often!—and treats you behind your back as if you were a cipher! I heard her saying, 'Oh, poor uneducated girl, she is wonderful, considering her bringing up—but—!'"

"Don't repeat any more, Ju!" interrupted her friend, hastily. "I don't want to dislike her, or suspect her, and we are bound together now for another whole year, and I must make the best of it!"

"Who settled that?"

"Horace. She has bewitched him!"

"She has not bewitched me, and I see her game! It is to establish a hold over you that will make her a pensioner for life—either that, or she would have no objection to marrying again!"

"Not Horace?" in genuine alarm. "What should I do?"

"Oh, dear no! Some well preserved

colonel or admiral, with plenty of money and plenty of conceit! Insidious flattery is her great weapon!"

"Oh! but you are not fair? She is very good-looking!"

"Yes, she is; but I believe her teeth are false—her hair is dyed—her face made up most beautifully. I grant you that; and in a dim room, with her back to the light, and especially in that black dress that looks all lace and jet, and with her big red face, she looks handsomer than even you or I with our youth! She studies every glance and every smile, and when I watch her I feel inclined to throw things at her!"

"She is most fascinating, Ju! Sings divinely, and is a charming companion!"

"Yes, to gentlemen—unless she has something to gain! She is generally very snobby to ladies. She is a snake in the grass!"

"I see you won't allow her one good point."

"No; not one—and let me warn you against her in time, Mary! I believe she is no more and no less than a crafty, self-seeking adventuress! You and your money are to put her well on in the world to fortune!"

"Girls!" said a low voice, opening the door. "It is not possible that you are not in bed yet. You will lose all your beauty sleep, Mary, darling!"

The speaker was, of course, Mrs. Clare, in slippers and a becoming crimson dressing-gown. Had she been at the keyhole? Had she heard anything? We know that listeners never hear any good of themselves, if she had been no exception to the rule!

However, she did not betray it! Her face was all smiles as she kissed Mary, embraced Julia, and playfully banished her to bed. She had wonderful command of her feelings.

Fully six months had elapsed; it was the depth of winter. Mrs. Clare had run up to London, and her charge was alone! Mrs. Seymour had gone home, and her "set" was scattered. Still Mary knew a good many people now; and Horace (cranky from the east winds), came and kept her company for the best part of each day.

One evening Miss Darvall was sitting alone in the dusk. Just before the time, thinking and thinking among other things of Julia, when, strange to say, the drawing-room door opened softly, and Julia herself walked in! She was clad in a long fur-lined cloak, and wore a veil lightly tied over her face; and she looked very pale and haggard in her friend's astounded eyes.

"I just turned the handle, and walked in below," she said, sitting down. "Where, in a lower voice?" is Mrs. Clare?

"In London—gone for a week's holiday!"

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated Julia, fervently.

"Where did you drop from, Ju? Let me take off your cloak and bonnet, dear! I'm so glad to see you, for I was just wondering about you, and what you were doing! You have not answered my last three letters? Where have you been?"

"Here, in Folkestone, quite close to you, for the last six weeks," motioning her away, and removing her veil as she spoke.

"Here, Julia?"

"Yes, I'll tell you all about it if you will just be quiet!"

"What is that thing you have under your cloak—a dog?" said Mary, leaning towards her.

"Dog—no!" pushing back her wrap, and revealing the outline of a very small, young baby.

"A baby!" ejaculated her friend, starting up. "Where in the world did you find it? Whose is it?"

"Mine!"

"Julia!" nearly shrieked her listener. "What are you saying?"

"Hush! Sit down! You shall hear in half-a-minute! You told me your secret, and I've kept it faithfully! Now you must hear, and keep mine! Last year Hector came home, we met quite accidentally in the street. He was

sent on business. He has got on in the world. Still he is only a superior steward!"

"Yes, go on—don't stop!"

"And we met. I was passing to the carriage and saw him, and it all came back! I nearly fell on his neck and burst out crying. There was no one like Hector, after all—not all the dandies and masher in London could really compare with him. We went into a bookshop close by and talked—oh! how we talked—and I made him promise to meet me in the Park next day—and we met often. We even went to church together on most Sundays. Time was getting on—in a month or two he had to return, and I persuaded him to marry me—and we were married quietly one morning, and went to Scotland for the honeymoon!"

"And were you not missed at home, or did they know?"

"No; they thought I was staying with a schoolfellow in Paris; they never knew."

"And don't they know now?"

"No; they think I have been staying with you for the last two months. All my letters, of course, have the post-mark 'Folkestone.'"

"Oh, Ju! And you were married when you were staying here last, and never told me!"

"I was on the eve of it once, only we were interrupted by Mrs. Clare. I was sure you would be angry; but I meant to tell you, and my courage failed."

"And what about your father?"

"Mary! He would kill me if he knew!"

"Where is Hector at present?"

"He went back to Australia; and when I can scrape up enough money I am going to join him; but that won't be, I am afraid, for months. I must go home immediately—and, remember, I have been staying here!"

"And what are you going to do with the baby?"

"I am going to leave the baby with you."

"With me!" echoed the other, with a gasp of horror. "Oh, Julia—no!"

"My dear Mary," said her friend, quite composedly, "you owe it to humanity. When you yourself were a baby you were taken in and kept by kind people, and cared for as their own."

"That is different, Julia. Oh! don't you see it? I had no mother—my father had been turned out of doors—"

"And," interrupted Julia, "don't you think that I would be turned out of doors at Daneford if I arrived there with this child?"

"No, not if you confessed all. Your father knows Hector Campbell; he approved of him once—you told me so."

"Once—yes; but if he knew that I was married to him now I believe he would kill me!"

"Why not write, and break it to him in that way, and stay here till you can join Hector? You can do that easily."

"Hector has gone to a fun in the interior; he will be away fully a year, and all my belongings are at Daneford. My diamonds—I could not afford to lose them."

"And what do you propose to do?"

"To return to-morrow, and leave the child here. It is a fine healthy boy, and little trouble. He will be a nice plaything for you, Mary."

"But, Julia!"

"You can say he is a foundling, can you not?"

"I cannot do anything of the sort! What would the servants think! How could I say I found it? What am I to say to Mrs. Clare—to the people I know? I know perfectly well what they would all say. Mary would say it was my own child!"

"And if they did, you could afford to laugh at them," said Julia, serenely.

"No, I could not—no one could. Risking one's good name is no joke—no laughing matter."

"You lost it once before, and it did you no harm!"

"Yes; but that was not of my free will that I lost it then; it would be this time, esides—"

"Besides, I know you are thinking of Captain Eliot. What would he say?" interrupted Julia, scornfully.

"Yes, I am; for I owe him at least one duty—to keep my name spotless."

"I hope he does as much for you, my dear! Mary! how can you be so stiff, and not do as I ask you! I thought you would have jumped at the dear little fellow" (looking admiringly at the red face in her lap). "Captain Eliot is still in Egypt, and by the time he comes home—say in a year—baby and I will be in Australia."

"Yes, Julia," returned her friend, sarcastically; "you will be safe and sound, but I shall be out of the pale of society, and in the wilderness of disgrace as your scapegoat!"

"That is nonsense!" returned Julia. "And so you won't take the child?"

"Why should you ask me to do such a thing?"

The two young ladies were now getting angry, and the fight was waxing hot over the unconscious infant, that lay in its mother's lap in peaceful slumber.

"Because you have always come to my rescue, and surely you would not leave me in the lurch now?"

"When you have managed your private affairs so skilfully so far, and eluded all suspicion, and have a baby and a husband, and yet pass off to the world as Miss Julia Darvall? I do not see that I could do anything in such schemes; I'm not nearly so bold or so clever."

"But you have a husband in the background, too," sneered Julia.

"Yes, I know that to my cost," returned the other, calmly.

"And you are no more Miss Darvall than I am! Miss Mary and Miss Julia we are to the world, but, sitting here, face to face, and speaking the truth, you are Mrs. Eliot, and I am Mrs. Campbell."

"Yes, and you were married of your own free will, and got into all this intriguing of your own accord, Julia, and I did not; I was passive. More, I was a victim to John Meadows's ambition, and old Mr. Eliot's sense of honour."

"I think you have no reason to complain! They married you to a handsome, gallant, wealthy gentleman."

"Against his will," added Mary. "Do not forget that part of the arrangement; it is rather important."

"Against his will, then; but he would gladly claim you now."

"Very likely; but now I am his equal."

"Yes, but when you were not his equal, when you were only Mary Meadows—a girl in service—he would have claimed you as his wife before the whole world. Don't forget that."

"I forget nothing. There are other things—things he said before my face at Carnforth Park—that I can never forget."

"You are unforgiving, Mary; and, what is more, you are cutting off your nose to spite your face. I'm sure you would be ten times happier, instead of living here a lonely girl, with no belongings, and just casual friends, to have your husband with you—a man who is devoted to you."

"Was—you may speak in the past tense; and even were he as much in love with me as ever, I doubt if his admiration and adoration would stand the test of your baby."

"You must help me, all the same, Mary. You have always done so, and I look to you quite naturally. You wrote my notes, and advised me, in old days; latterly you have been awfully generous to me with money—I mean not only to papa, but those cheques you have given me, and bills you have paid—you dear, good girl!"

"Money is nothing. If this was only money, Julia, you know you would not have to ask twice!"

"Hush!" said Mary; "there is someone coming!" hurriedly drawing into the shade, and hastily concealing the child in her lap.

Enter the afternoon tea-tray, and candles

brought in by two men in livery. They were promptly followed by two Folkestone ladies, full of spirits, and thirsting for, as they said, "for tea and news!"

They were slightly acquainted with Miss Darvell (Miss Julia), and rather wondered that she sat in the shadow of the fire curtains, and did not rise to greet them, but merely gave them a cold and rather (and no wonder) nervous nod! What would they have said had they seen what lay hidden and, most luckily, asleep in her lap?

The party was joined by Mr. Montagu in his long, fur-lined coat, which partly concealed his deformity. He was in the habit of dropping in at this hour at Bellevue most evenings. He was amazed to see Julia, but Julia and he had never been friendly. He accepted her distant greeting as a matter of course.

"You look very ill!" he said, abruptly.

"Do I? So do you!"

"When did you come?"

"Quite recently."

"Making a stay?"

"No!"

"Are you not stifled in that heavy cloak?" remarked one of the ladies. "Don't you think (to Mary) she ought to take it off in this hot room? You really look quite faint!" rising and approaching to Mary's horror.

"Please never mind me—please leave me alone!" returned Julia, with a sharpness that was quite startling; and her would-be benefactor, thus repulsed, sat down again, and took up her tea-cup with rather flushed countenance.

Meanwhile, Mary, whose nerves were on edge, and who felt almost hysterical at the situation, had been trying to do the honours of the tea-table; but she was awkward—unusually so; she dropped teaspoons with a clang, scattered lumps of sugar, and the cups she handed to her friends literally rattled in their saucers. Supposing the child were to wake with all this loud talking and laughing?

The idea made beads of perspiration stand upon her temples. These two chatty visitors were the greatest gossips in Folkestone, and went from one tea to another the whole afternoon relating all the choicest bits of scandal—and what a scandal was here!

"Did you hear about Miss Croly—the girl from Leeds, who was staying with the Smith Jones last spring?" said one of them. "A tall, dashing girl, who rode and dressed, and flirted tremendously. I'm sure you knew her!"

"No; I heard nothing," returned Mary, in a faint voice.

"Then only imagine all these years she has been coming to Folkestone she is a married woman all the time, and passing herself off as a girl, and going about everywhere with a chaperon! What do you say to that?"

Mary was not able to find any appropriate answer, and Humpy gallantly came to her rescue by upsetting his tea, and making a great fuss about his coat and the carpet—so much so that the thread of the ladies' discourse was broken; and after a few disjointed remarks—touching Miss Croly and her husband, who must, of course, have had "good reason of his own" for deserting her, and who was a naval officer on the China station—these visitors at last got up and took their leave; and as Mr. Montagu walked with them to the door Mary rang the bell and bent over, and whispered to her other visitor—

"Slip out through the back drawing-room, run up to my bed-room and lock the door. I'll be after you as soon as I can get rid of him!"

CHAPTER XXI.

Mr. Montagu was in a bad temper, and unusually curious, and he kept Mary for fully half an hour, "roasting" her, as it were, over a slow fire of questions—awkward questions.

"What was that young woman coming here for so suddenly? Any row at home?"

"Why did she look so scared—frightened out of her wit?"

"Why was she so silent? She, who had usually such a gift of the gab?"

"Where was she now? When was she going home?"

At length he went away, and Mary dashed upstairs and knocked gently at the door of her own room. It was a small one—not nearly as grand as Mrs. Clare's, with a simple, white-draped iron bed, white curtains, and maple furniture. It had a good view of the sea, and got all the morning sun, and that was why Mary chose it.

"I'm nearly out of my wits," whispered Julia, as she stealthily opened the door. "When I came up I put baby in the bed and undressed, and then I must have fainted from the worry and fatigue, for the next thing I remember was your temporary housekeeper lifting me on to the sofa. I made an excuse about the heat and being over-tired, and she had no suspicion, for she did not see the child. Oh, how shall we manage about it?"

"We must hide it somehow. I've told Carter, that's a my maid, you know, that you are not well; that she is not to disturb you, and that I will wait on you myself. You and I can sleep together—though it will be a tight fit—or I'll sleep on the sofa."

"And if the baby wakes in the night, and brings up the whole house, what is to be done?"

"Oh! Heaven forbid! But if it does cry, we will put it in my wardrobe. I'll make it a nice soft bed on some shawls and cloths!"

"And smother it alive!" exclaimed Julia, indignantly.

"Oh, no, there's lots of ventilation, and a little thing like that does not want much air; but, please goodness, it will be quiet—the wardrobe will be our last resource!"

"And—what other ideas have you besides the wardrobe?"

"I shall bring you up your dinner, and then you shall go to bed, and I'll tell you my plans—all in good time!"

"Tell them now!" said Julia, impatiently. "Don't keep me on tenter-hooks!"

"Well, I've not quite decided, but one thing is certain. I can't keep the baby in the house. I have an idea, though!"

"Let us have it at once!"

"The man who does up the garden has a wife and small family. I've passed his cottage often. It's about two miles out of Folkestone. They might take it for a while, perhaps, and we could drive over there, and see them the first thing in the morning, or why not leave it with the woman at your lodgings?"

"She and I have quarrelled. I sent my box to the station before I came here to-day. She is a horrid low tormagant!"

"What name did she know you by?"

"My own—Mrs. Campbell. I get all my letters at the Post-office, myself called for them. Latterly she suspects me, and says, to quote her horrible language, 'that I am not all right, and she won't have me in her respectable house!'"

"And so you have no resource but me!" returned Mary, in despair.

"None whatever! And I depend on you!" replied Julia, who always made a point of shuffling off her troubles on anyone else's shoulders, and who took Mary's assistance as a matter of course, and who really was much the most unconcerned of the party.

She had got into a scrape, and it was Mary's business to see her through it, and that was the whole matter in a nutshell. Her coolness exasperated her companion, who said,

"And supposing I refuse to mix myself up in your affairs, and leave you to your own devices?"

"Oh, you won't do that! You are my friend! More than that, you are my cousin. You must not forget that, and blood is thicker than water!"

"So they say; but having no relatives to speak of, I don't know. However, Ju, I will do what I can for you. I'll go down now and think it all over carefully, and presently I'll

bring you up your dinner. You might put on one of my tea-gowns, and I'll put a match to the fire!"

"You have not forgotten your old trade then?" said Julia, removing her bonnet and cloak. To this her hostess made no reply, but having lit the fire, placed a chair near it, flung a tea-gown across it, said—

"No use in lending you slippers—mine would not keep on you!" left the room.

Luckily there was no occasion to immure the infant in the wardrobe. It did wake and cry once, but not loudly enough to warrant any extreme measures. Mary's plan was as follows:

Early in the morning Julia was to slip out of the house and go down to a private hotel, and have her breakfast and wait for Mary, who would call for her alone in the pony carriage, drive her out to the gardener's cottage, where she could make arrangements at her own discretion, Mary providing the needful money, and then she would be driven to the train.

This seemed a very feasible idea, and in the beginning all went well.

Julia, wrapped up in her cloak, departed about eight o'clock in the morning (of course, carrying the baby), and two hours afterwards Mary rattled up to the Fortescue Arms, and asked the waiter to send a man to stand at the ponies' heads, whilst she went inside and spoke to a friend.

She alighted, and was promptly shown into a sitting-room, and asked for Mrs. Campbell, but in her stead the landlady appeared, carrying the baby! To Mary's inquiry and gesture of surprise, she said,

"The lady could not wait. She said she was bound to go by the nine o'clock express, and that you would call for the child; Miss Darvell."

There was a look in the landlady's eyes that made Miss Darvell's face blase, and she said very quickly,—

"I am surprised, indeed, that Mrs. Campbell left her baby like this among strangers!"

"Oh! She said as how she had every dependence on you, miss, and you would call for it sure and certain!"

"Say nothing about it, please! And just lend me an old shawl to wrap it up in, and I'll take it away at once. What am I to give you for your trouble?"

"No trouble at all, ma'am. It's a pleasure!"

So it would be to have this fine story to relate to the whole town, agent Miss Darvell the heiress.

"Then take this!" placing a ten-pound note in her hand, "and say nothing. I know what you think!" her face burning as she spoke; "but you are wrong. If I treated Mrs. Campbell rightly I would go away and leave the child here, and let her provide for it as best she could!"

There was a flush in her eyes as she spoke, and a ring in her voice that somewhat staggered her hearer's suspicions, and she carefully wrapped up the child and herself, and carried it out, placed it in Miss Darvell's lap as she took up the reins, whispered,

"I'll not say a word, miss, to man or mortal!"

Miss Darvell gave her a little quick nod, and drove rapidly away. Her heart was hot within her. She was very, very angry with Julia, who had simply used her as a cat's-paw, and seemed to intend to sacrifice her reputation and save herself from an unpleasant reckoning at home.

That interview with Mrs. Brown at the hotel was very bad, but a worse awaited her. She really did not know how she was to face Mrs. Scott with a made-up story.

The ponies were fast, and indeed Miss Darvell could not hold them in properly, driving as she was with a living bundle in her lap—a bundle that was becoming exceedingly restless.

At last they reached their destination; a neat white-washed cottage covered, with

creepers, with a garden in front a few yards back from the public road.

Mrs. Scott took her hands out of the wash-tub, dried them and gave her cap a twitch, and hurried out to the gate where she heard the ponies stop.

Miss Darvall's visits were remarkable events, and she never came empty-handed—remembering her own poverty—a dozen yards of flannel, a sovereign to buy boots, a parcel of good tea, a dozen pots of jam—a fritter of bacon were among her gifts! What had she brought today?

Mrs. Scott could not believe her eyes—no, not her own ears, when the young lady, with a rather white face, whispered in her ear,—

"A baby!"

"Here, take it, Mrs. Scott," she added, "Send one of your boys to mind the ponies, and I'll come in and talk to you."

Sat down in Mrs. Scott's parlour she told her strand:

"This child—a boy she believed, and a few weeks old—was the son of a friend of hers, who was secretly married, and who wanted to put it quietly out to nurse until she could rejoin her husband, who was in Australia."

"And she left it to you to do for her, miss? And—and then, I think she was no friend of yours!" dandling the baby angrily as she spoke. "It was very ill-done of her. She might have at least given the business to a married lady!"

At this speech Miss Darvall became unaccountably red, and then said,—

"She has certainly not—not treated me well, Mrs. Scott! I only suggested your taking the child as I knew of no one else, and I was to have driven her here to settle matters with you yourself; and when I went to the hotel just now she was gone, and had left it to me to arrange about the baby. I had a great mind to leave it where I found it—only, having been, as everyone has heard, a deserted child myself, I pitied the little creature, and brought it here to you—as you see!"

"And what am I to do with it, miss?"

"Keep it and rear it as one of your own—or, if that is out of the question, tell me of some kind, honest woman who will take it. You must see as well as I do that it cannot stay with me!"

"Well, miss, anyone but a born fool could see that! And I must say your friend has played you a really wicked trick. I've four of my own, as you know; but the eldest girl is handy. I suppose the child will have to get the bottle, and good cow's milk?"

"Of course; and it is hungry enough now, to judge by its screams! Can't you give it something to keep it quiet?"

"Well, shall I keep it, miss, to oblige you?"

"Do, Mrs. Scott. It won't be with you for more than a year, and it will be made worth your while!"

"And who is to pay for it?" inquired the woman bluntly.

"I am, of course," responded the young lady, cheerfully. "You may look to me for everything!" charmed to get rid of it at any price.

"Then shall we say one pound a week, miss?"

"Yes—yes."

"Paid in advance—monthly?"

"Certainly."

"And you provide the clothes and doctor's fees?"

"I'll provide *everything!*" she answered, emphatically.

Now Mrs. Scott's first suspicions were confirmed. A young lady brings a baby, and tells a lame story, with a very red face—no mother visible—and undertakes to pay for the child's keep in the most liberal manner out of her own pocket! What was a reasonable person to think?

Mrs. Scott knew very well what she thought; but Miss Darvall was a kind, liberal, mistress, and she would keep her tongue quiet, and her thoughts to herself. Who would have thought it? and Miss Darvall was such a beautiful,

proud-looking young lady! Dear, dear, it was a pity—a sad, sad pity!

Little did her visitor guess the ideas that were passing through her mind. She attributed her gravity to this unexpected addition of her family circle, and a study of ways and means.

"You will tell your husband, and no one else. You can say that the lady lives near Caversham."

"Yes, miss. And you will be out to see the child pretty often, of course," rejoined Mrs. Scott, rather significantly.

"There is no *of course* about it, Mrs. Scott," very sharply; "I'll come sometimes, and you will keep the master quiet. Don't let Scott talk about it, and keep my name entirely out of the affair," getting into her carriage as she spoke.

"Would you not like to kiss him before you go, miss?"

"Certainly not. I can't bear young babies. Much rather him a puppy or a kitten. Let it have the best of everything, you know, and I'll pay; that's all I can do."

"Stay, miss! What is its name?"

"Name! I really don't think it has been christened; but I'll find out and let you know!" So saying, with a wave of her whip, the boy stood away from the ponies' heads, who delighted to turn homeward, dashed off at the top of their speed.

"She does not know its name!" muttered Mrs. Scott, as she walked back to the cottage; "and if she does not know, who would? and its mother comes from near Caversham—and so does *she!* And she doesn't like young babies. No, I *daresay* not! She brings one here, and pays for its keep, and I'm to keep her name out of the business! Well, I'll never put faith in a nice, quiet-spoken young lady again—never! However, it's an ill wind blows nobody good. That child will be a clear thirty pounds a year in our pocket, and may be more, and Polly can look after him; it will be just training for her, and a fine opportunity."

"Whose is the baby, mother?" inquired Folly, as she hushed it about in her arms. "Is it to stay here?"

"It's to stay here! As to whose it is, it's a lady's, and you ask no questions, and you'll hear no lies!"

The letter that Mary despatched to her friend, the day after that friend had so meanly despoiled, conveyed a very strong piece of her mind, and a threat to have nothing to say to her in any way for the future, and a stern showing up of Miss Julia's deceit, selfishness, and meanness.

This letter brought by return of post a very humble epistle from the culprit. Writing was easy. She heaped reproaches on her own head, she called herself bad names, all over two sheets, and she mentally laid herself in the dust beneath her cousin's feet. All this was no trouble to her, and Mary knew it. She knew perfectly well that, in some ways, Julia was much too clever for her, and that she was her cat's paw; and that if there was any "row" about her infant at Mrs. Scott's, it was Mary, and not Julia Darvall, who would have to pull the chestnuts out of the fire!

Mrs. Clare's holidays lengthened themselves out to a whole month, and her young charge was by no means deeply afflicted at her absence; it gave her ample time to realize her position, and to put all the affairs of little "John"—that was the child's name—on a secure and secret footing—so she thought, poor deluded mortal. But Mrs. Clare had not been twenty-four hours in her house before, in vulgar parlance, "she smelt a rat!"

"And so you had Julia Darvall here for a night!" she said, as they sat at lunch, the day after her arrival.

"Yes."

"What brought her?"

"The train, I believe."

"How absurd you are, Marie! I mean, what was her object in paying such a flying visit?"

"She came to see me."

"Why, dear?" helping herself to a glass of hook.

"On business."

Naturally Mrs. Clare would have liked to have said, "What business?" but there were lengths to which even she dare not go! So she finished her chicken and outlet and tossed off her glass of hook in silence, but all the time there was a world of speculation in her eyes as they watched her companion's.

By judicious questioning as to that young lady's recent movements, she discovered various curious facts. She held long private talks with Mrs. Scott, and she gave Mrs. Scott money—as much as a five-pound note at a time—for Carter, coming suddenly into her boudoir, had seen her in the very act of handing a five-pound note to Mrs. Scott, and she was saying—

"He will want a pelisse of some sort!"

What did this mean? Besides this, Mrs. Clare was out driving with her ward one afternoon, and as they trotted past Mrs. Scott's gate, a girl or woman, undressed out and held aloft a baby in a red pelisse, in a style that was so significant, that the next afternoon Mrs. Clare, having told her charge that she was going to a *prayer meeting*, considered it her duty to drive out in a fly to Mrs. Scott's abode, and to pass her under the hammer of a searching examination!

At first Mrs. Scott was stiff and silent, but afterwards she relaxed and gave in inch by inch. What match was the fair woman of Mrs. Clare's experience?—a woman who for the last twenty-five years had fought the battles of life in a marvellous manner with tongue and wits.

Finding Mrs. Scott sour and impenetrable, she drew a well-tried weapon. She burst into tears!

"Mrs. Scott," she said, "I leave it to your own heart, and I'll do no more. Supposing an orphan was left in your charge, and you were responsible for her—not only to her friends, but your own conscience? Supposing she had been badly brought up, and was the possessor of thousands she did know how to deal with? Supposing she was of a naturally shy and secret-like nature, and that you knew she had some secret she kept from you, that it was your duty to discover—only for her sake, mind you! only to keep her and shield her—don't you think it would be the duty of another woman—a mother herself—to help her?"

But Mrs. Scott still held out, and her crafty visitor still sobbing into her handkerchief, said,—

"Of course, if you think it wrong to tell me you are quite right, only, then I shall have to do something *very* unpleasant, that I hate having recourse to! In her best interests I must place the matter in the hands of the police. I shall have no other recourse but a detective."

Mrs. Scott turned quite pale and said,—

"What is it you want to know, ma'am?"

"I want to know all about that *baby*!" she rejoined, with another burst of tears.

"Will you promise it goes no further on your honour, as a lady, and speaking, as you say, only in *her* interests?"

"I'll promise, of course. Now do speak. Whose is it, dear Mrs. Scott?"

"Well, I've nothing to go on."

"But even so. Who brought it here to you?"

"Miss Darvall herself."

"Who pays for it?"

"Miss Darvall."

"How, and when?"

"Mostly by hand. I go and 'et'ch the money."

"What is it called?"

"John."



[ON THE BRINK OF DISCOVERY.]

"Of course, after her adopted father! John Meadows! What did she tell you? What was the story? for, of course, she never acknowledged that it was her own; that would be the last thing she would do!"

"She said that it had been left for her at the hotel by a lady—a friend of hers—who was privately married, and that she came from near Caversham."

"Oh, that's where she comes from herself. Her place is down there!"

"Indeed, ma'am! So I've heard, ma'am!"

"Yes; I'm afraid there is no doubt about this sad business. I only wish there were! And it so happened that I was from home—I mean from Folkestone—for five weeks. I am heartbroken, Mrs. Scott; I am, indeed!"

"And, indeed, no wonder! To think such a beautiful young lady, that looks like a princess, could so forget herself—she that used to hold her head so high!"

"And does still! How did she look when she brought you this miserable baby?"

"Dreadfully cut up, and very white; and afterwards I never saw any one blush like her—never. You could have lit a candle at her face!"

"And I don't wonder!"

"She is very good to it in the way of money, though she's not what you would call a *ford* mother. She never asks to nurse it, or take it in her arms."

"Very likely not! She is a cold-blooded creature! And now, Mrs. Scott," putting a sovereign in her hand, "this is for yourself—remember that. I must be going now. And bear in mind, if you happen to meet me, that you have never seen me before, and that I have never been here in my life. You have done your duty, and you won't regret it. It now becomes my task to shield the unfortunate girl from the consequences of her folly," saying which Mrs. Clare pulled down her veil, shook hands very warmly with Mrs. Scott, stepped into her hired fly, and drove away in great joy.

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She was not aware that her handsome chaperon thoroughly understood her interest in Mrs. Scott.

"Such a respectable woman," Mary declared, "and with quite a family of children."

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"Well, Polly! How are you all at home, and how is the baby?" such brazen courage under her very nose almost petrified Mrs. Clare!

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She had declined half-a-dozen invites to Daneford; she hated the place, although it was her own, and she had never forgiven her

cousin Julia—and declared to herself that she never would.

Her life consisted of tennis, teas, drives, a little boating, dancing, and flirting, a good deal of reading and a good deal of certain amount of remorse, and a certain amount of large-handed charity.

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[THE BEAUTIFUL STRANGER AGAIN.]

NOVELETTES]

SINGLETHORPE MANOR.

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The drawing room, in which they were now seated, if not modernly, was elegantly furnished, and as the reclining rays of an August sun fell on the rich purple of curtains and upholstery, and glanced off to the massive gilt frames of the valuable pictures, there was nothing wanting, and nothing existing, which could not satisfy the most fastidious taste.

"So Elfie will be here to-morrow!" said the eldest of the three ladies, as, removing her gold spectacles, she passed an open letter to her sisters.

"Poor child!" returned one of the latter, whilst perusing the same. "These second marriages seldom make home the same place to the first family, and for poor Edward's sake we will do all in our power to make her happy."

Poor Edward was an only brother who had died but one year since, leaving a young widow, who had within the last month married again, a proceeding against which her youthful daughter rebelled, as though by so doing her mother had entailed upon her the greatest misery imaginable.

"Oh! aunties, do let me live with you. I am so miserable," she wrote, and the sympathies of the ladies being wholly with their niece, whom they considered as deeply injured as she did herself by the step their sister-in-law had taken, they at once responded to her wish.

"She shall never enter the Manor whilst we live," said Eleanor, the youngest, referring to the latter, when after reading Elfie's letter she returned it to the other.

"Most indecent I consider it," Matilda, the eldest, rejoined. "Edward scarcely cold in his grave before she takes another husband; but ring the bell, Sarah, for lights! I have no patience to discuss the subject."

However, notwithstanding this assertion, it was long after the curtains had been drawn shutting out the glorious moonlight, in which the grounds of Singlethorpe had become bathed, that Edward's widow, with all her sins and vanity, was fully commented upon.

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"Let's see!" Matilda replied, calculating the years on her white taper fingers, "she must be fifteen."

"Fifteen! dear me. Well, it will be much better that she should be here than in London, and with such a mother, too!" and Eleanor seemed puzzled to know which was the greater danger to the young girl—the metropolis, which she looked upon as a sink of iniquity, or the society of her late brother's wife; but as the chimes of the clock struck eleven the door opened, and the servants, preceded by the butler who carried the family Bible, filed to prayers, and the quiet day at Singlethorpe came to a close.

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displaying themselves from between her coral lips.

"Well, no," she answered, the colour deepening on her face; "that is to say, the latter part was not, for after I had tried in vain to become interested in the dullest of novels, and had been almost made a convert by one of the Salvation Army, a gentleman entered the carriage. Well, of course, the weather paved the way to conversation, and so delightful a companion did he prove himself that I soon shut up my book. The Hallelujah young lady did the same with her eyes, and we chatted, he and I, on until the train arrived at Singlethorpe."

"And there, of course, you parted?" Miss Eleanor said, with a smile.

"Oh! not at all!" the girl laughed, "for who do you think he is? He know you quite well."

"Give an description," the aunts replied, "and if he lives in or near here, doubtless we shall soon discover who he is."

But a knock and ring at the hall door stopped the description which Elsie had already commenced, and her large eyes opened in wonderment when Captain Kerson, her fellow-traveller was announced.

He was between thirty and thirty-five years of age, tall and well built, looking even older, from a settled shade of melancholy pervading his features, as though some past sorrow had left its indelible mark upon his countenance, which strive as he would to forget, would ever be present with him, whilst this very sadness gave an irresistible charm to his manner.

"Good evening, ladies!" he said, returning their cordial greeting. "I trust you will excuse my intruding on you at this time, but I feel rather anxious to know that my little travelling companion had arrived safe."

And then he held out his hand to Elsie, who, blushing and confused, had taken refuge behind Miss Musgrave's chair.

"I am sure you are very kind, Reginald," that lady replied, "my niece was just telling us about you," and then the conversation drifted into ordinary topics, until the growing shades of twilight warned their visitor that it was time to say adieu.

"Isn't he delightful, auntie?" said Elsie, when the door closed on the latter. And she would have indulged in further coquettishness in praise of the same had not something in the face of Miss Musgrave stayed the words on her lips, whilst "that Captain Kerson was a gentleman," was all she could elicit from either of the maiden sisters.

Feeling sure that she must be fatigued after her journey, it was yet early when Elsie was led to the pretty room assigned her, where shortly after, with her glossy curl resting on the snowy pillow, she wondered in her mind why her aunts were so reticent with regard to the Captain, and then fell asleep to dream that she was on the brink of a precipice, when a strong arm saved her from a dreadful death, and when she opened her eyes to look into the face of her preserver it was the face of Reginald Kerson.

CHAPTER II.

THE DAWN OF LOVE.

"I fear, my child, you will find it very dull here with three old maids for companions," Miss Matilda said, when the next morning Elsie descended to breakfast, looking fresh and fair as an opening bud, whilst she cheerfully returned her aunt's greeting; "but Eleanor will show you over the grounds before lunch, and that will be something new after town life; and there is a pretty lake on the west side, possession of which you can dispute in future with the swans, who, up to now, have reigned supreme on its surface."

"Dull!" repeated the girl. "I am sure I shall never be that, auntie dear," and, indeed, Elsie never did seem to tire of the life which followed at the Manor.

As a sunbeam she seemed to have entered within the walls of the old house, entwining herself around the hearts of her relatives, each day developing more fully that beauty for which the Musgroves had ever been famous; whilst to the ladies themselves she but brought to their remembrance the face of the dead brother they had so fondly loved, as they lavished on his child all the affection which had once been his, and Elsie knew no greater happiness than in the warm summer days to ram unchecked amid the slopes and valleys surrounding the Manor, with Gip for her companion, or to lazily float o'er the surface of the lake in the little boat, assigned to her especial use.

It was in these wanderings that she was oftentimes accompanied by Reginald Kerson. At first by accident they met, in the yellow autumn, until the walks became so frequent, and each little dreamt of the danger into which they were drifting, as they trod the dead leaves beneath their feet, until so late they were rudely awakened to the knowledge that their hopes were false as they.

"Do come in and see Aunt Matilda," said Elsie, as three months later they had returned from one of these walks; "she seems so ill."

And on his acquiescing—

"Auntie dear, Captain Kerson has come to see you," the girl added, when opening the door of the drawing-room a few moments later she bade him enter.

Miss Musgrave was seated by the fire, looking very pale and worn, a faint smile of pleasure passing over her countenance when Elsie approached her.

"I am so sorry to see you so ill," Captain Kerson said, advancing.

"Yes, I am ill," replied the lady, "but I suppose Elsie told you I intend leaving Singlethorpe for the winter, purposing to pass the same at Ilfracombe; and don't you think the change will be good for her too? It is so cold here; besides"—after a pause—"I could not spare my darling," she added, and the thin aged hand passed caressingly over her glossy curls.

"Perhaps so," the Captain replied, thinking the while how ill he could spare Elsie either, and his sad eyes wandered to her fair face; but it was only a moment that his eyes met hers, and then he fully entered with the other sisters into the arrangements made for Miss Musgrave's journey, when a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"You know I am an idle man," he said, addressing the latter, "and I should feel it a pleasure if you will allow me to accompany you to the south. I may be useful, you know, seeing to your luggage, &c., for I am sure you will require the exclusive services of your maid."

"You are indeed kind, Reginald," the ladies chimed in; "we cannot thank you enough." And Miss Musgrave, gladly availing herself of his offer, it was finally arranged that he was to be of the party to the end of their journey.

The doctor had urged that no time should be lost in leaving Singlethorpe, he considering it the only thing likely to save the life of his patient, so that scarcely a week elapsed before everything was in preparation for their departure.

It was a cold bleak day when the carriage drove up, which was to carry them to the station; but notwithstanding the blast wind which was blowing, and her sister's entreaty to postpone the undertaking, Miss Musgrave declined to alter her arrangements.

"It would be putting everybody out," she said, so gave her orders that there should be plenty of fur rugs and wraps provided for their accommodation, when, followed by Elsie, robed in sealskin paletot, with a coquettish little hat to match, after an affectionate farewell to her sisters, they bid good-bye to the Manor.

Captain Kerson was awaiting them at the station, and but a short time intervened be-

fore they were on their way to the metropolis, where they were to pass the night.

Notwithstanding the cold, and the fatigue attendant on the journey, Miss Musgrave was better than could have been expected, and was not only able, but quite anxious, to start for Devonshire the following morning.

"Stay here," Captain Kerson said, whilst he saw that they were comfortably encooned by the large fire which was burning in the first-class waiting-room, "and I will procure a carriage to ourselves," and he tenderly pressed Elsie's hand, telling her he would not be long.

"What a time he is!" the letter said at last, when, on looking at the clock which hung over the chimney piece, she found it was past half-past ten, and no Reginald, when, losing all patience as the first bell sounded, she told Langdon, the maid, to stay with her aunt, and she would go to ascertain the cause.

Passengers were hurrying forward to secure their different places, whilst porters were wheeling trolleys laden with luggage, and the engine snorting as though in impatience to be off, but still no sign of the Captain—until, with a last shrill shriek, the ponderous wheels moved over the metals, and, as a thing of life, it went forward, and the train left the station.

To return to where her aunt, with Langdon, awaited her was all that Elsie could do, after inquiring when the next train would start.

"Not for another two hours," the man answered; and, sick at heart, she was about to return to the waiting-room.

"Two hours!" she mentally ejaculated. "What shall I do?" And the tears started to her eyes, as a hundred fears suggested themselves to her imagination, when, suddenly turning by a bookstall, she came face to face with the subject of her thoughts.

"Oh! Captain Kerson," she said, "I was so frightened. I have been looking everywhere for you, and the train has left!"

"I am so sorry," he said, offering her his arm; but his face was deadly pale, and the agitation under which he was labouring he could ill-conceal, as he led her to her aunt.

Fortunately that lady had fallen into a peaceful slumber amid the cushions which Langdon had arranged for her comfort—the reason which was given her, on her awaking, that they had missed the train.

But although when, after the stated time, they entered the next, the young officer vainly endeavoured to recover his usual spirits, Elsie was alone aware that something dreadful must have occurred, whilst her youthful heart went out in sympathy with his.

"You won't be very vexed that I cannot, as I had at first intended, remain with you longer than to see you comfortably located at your hotel?" he asked of Miss Musgrave, who, after her sleep, seemed fully to enjoy the prospect of her journey.

"Why?" she answered. "Is it imperative, Reginald, that you should return?"

She always called him Reginald, for they had been such old friends; and so mixed up had he been in her life that Miss Musgrave had learnt to look on him more in the light of a nephew. And now it was more for Elsie's sake than her own that she regretted the change in his plans.

She had noticed with a glad heart the feeling of attachment which had grown up between the two, of which they were scarcely themselves aware, little dreaming of the cruel fate which would shatter their hopes and teach them a love they dare not cherish.

"Circumstances over which I have no control have occurred which obliges me to forego a pleasure to which I had looked forward with delight!" and, as he spoke, his eyes wandered to the corner where Elsie sat, her eyes seemingly fixed on the pages of the novel they had purchased at the railway bookstall; and his heart sank within him as he saw, when she once raised them to his, that a sudden expression of sadness came over her features.

But it was only a moment; and then, as if all were schooling themselves to meet the inevitable, they admired the country through which they were passing; they spoke of the weather—everything but the subject most in their thoughts.

It was late when they at last arrived at their destination, but the invalid bore the fatigue of the journey much better than they expected; and had Reginald been her son he could not more have studed her comfort during the few hours he could remain.

Elise could not avoid noticing the look of anxiety he cast around him, when they first alighted from the carriage, and the excited restlessness he evinced until they were seated in the conveyance which was to take them to the Sea View Hotel; not until they were in their own private room recovering his self-possession.

CHAPTER III.

THE BEAUTIFUL STRANGER.

"GOOD-BYE," he said, the next morning, when he was about to return to London by an early train, whilst pressing Elise's hand, and looking with those sad eyes of his into hers; "take care of your aunt;" and, after a moment's pause, "sometimes think of me."

They were alone in the pretty room with its bay window looking out on the fathomless ocean. Although November, the air was soft and balmy as June; and, entering in at the open frame, tossed the black glossy curls from the girl's fair forehead.

He was very near her, so near that she could feel his tawny moustache touch her cheek, and the warmth of his breath, as he raised his hand to the rebellious hair, and then lifting her head. She read the secret in the love-glance which met her own.

She knew how this parting was telling him the truth against which he had battled so long, how dear she had become to him in those glad summer days at Singletorpe Manor; but when her heart beat with tumultuous joy, and she would have leant on his bosom in the first delight of her new-born happiness, after one passionate embrace, in which he pressed kisses of fire on her lips, already wreathed with the smiles of love, he almost pushed her from him, and then left her—with nothing but that love-dream to haunt her in the days which followed, when, with her aunt—her sole companion—she would hour by hour watch the restless sea, whilst the waves tossed and foamed at her feet.

"Captain Kerson is a strange man, auntie," she said one day, whilst walking beside the invalid chair, in which the latter was seated; "he has never written since we came to Devonshire, and he went away so suddenly, too!"

"Yea," Miss Musgrove answered, looking keenly at her niece; but Elise was studiously contemplating the ground they were treading, never raising her head, whilst she continued,—"He always seems to me like some one who has known a great trouble."

"Poor Reginald; he has known trouble; but there is a skeleton in every house, Elise," was the rejoinder.

And then Miss Musgrove gave directions that she should be wheeled to her hotel, for the air was growing keen.

"You might be more careful," the former heard some one say.

Sia had only left her aunt's chair a moment, to look at some trifles in a shop window, when the words fell on her ears. They were in a woman's voice, and when Elise hastened to see what was the matter, she found that, in turning, the man had accidentally caught the hem of a lady's dress under the wheel.

She was a tall fair woman, of about twenty-five or six, with large blue eyes looking out from beneath a cluster of auburn curls, which completely shaded her forehead; but the rose tint on her white skin deepened to a carna-

tion hue when, in turning sharply to remonstrate with the former, she encountered the gaze of Miss Musgrove.

"Good heavens!" she was heard to ejaculate, under her breath; and then she hastily moved on with her companion, a middle aged man of military bearing.

"What a horrid woman! and how she did look at you, auntie," Elise said. "Do you know her?"

"No, dear," was the reply; "but I knew some one once, so like her that did I not know she was dead, I should have believed it was the same; but she was a bad woman, Elise, and yet I loved her dearly, once; but I shall be glad to get back, dear, I am so cold."

There were some letters awaiting them, on their return from Singletorpe, in which the sisters hoped they were deriving benefit from the change.

"It was very cold and bleak at the Manor," they wrote, "and the woods looked sad, with the dead leaves covering the ground. Reginald Kerson had called many times to hear if there were any news, but he seemed so ill that they had recommended he ought to have a change himself, but he would not hear of it;" and then, with love and kisses to dear Elise, whose glad voice they said they missed so much, they brought the same to a close.

The next day Miss Musgrove was too ill to take her accustomed airing; she had caught a chill, and so Elise had to go by herself; but she soon grew weary, and her thoughts became sad, as they returned to that last parting with Captain Kerson.

"I am sure there is something sad in his history, and auntie knows it," she ruminated, when, with the full intention of that night begging the latter to tell her what it was, she turned her steps homewards, when, some one gently touching her on the shoulder, she gave a start, to find Reginald himself by her side.

"You here, Captain Kerson!" she exclaimed. "How you frightened me! Have you seen auntie? And when did you come down?"

The questions came all in a breath, whilst the colour came and went beneath her olive skin, until, at last, left her pale as marble.

"I have been to the hotel, Elise," he replied, "and Miss Musgrove telling me I should find you here I came. Are you not glad to see me?"

"I am so glad," she faltered, and was about to take the arm he had offered, when a laugh from behind attracted their attention, and, simultaneously turning, Elise saw it had proceeded from the lips of the woman they had met the previous evening.

She was with the same companion as on the former occasion, but further than a star on the part of both they passed on, and when Elise moved to again take the Captain's arm, she thought it strange how stern and grief-stricken he had suddenly become.

No allusion was made to the rencontre by either when they returned to the hotel; and, indeed, Miss Musgrove's cold had taken such a serious turn that they both became anxious—an anxiety which in the morning proved not to be without foundation.

"No, don't write to Sarah and Eleanor," she said, in answer to the entreaties of both the Captain and Elise that they should be communicated with, "it would only frighten them; and, doubtless, with care, I shall soon be as well as usual."

But notwithstanding all the care and attention she received, Miss Musgrove became gradually worse, until it was imperative that a telegram should be sent to Singletorpe without delay, and Reginald, with Elise, forgot for the time being aught else but the grave symptoms which surrounded the fate of their beloved friend.

It was only while awaiting the sisters' arrival that they would, at the desire of the invalid, go out for an hour to restore, as she said, the roses to her darling's face, feeling she was perfectly safe in the keeping of the officer; but after the first day of his coming

they never again encountered the beautiful woman whose presence appeared to have such a strange effect on the latter.

CHAPTER IV.

NO HOPE.

Two days necessarily elapsed before the Misses Musgrove could arrive from Singletorpe, during which, with the exception of that two hours' ramble by the seashore, Reginald and Elise were intermittent in their watch by the sick bed, and a gleam of pleasure would pass over the countenance of the invalid, as she alternately gazed from one to the other.

"I shall never see the Manor again," she said, when, on the eve of the second day, they sat in the sick-room awaiting the coming of the ladies from Singletorpe, Elise with her hand clasped within that of her aunt, whilst Captain Kerson occupied a seat on the other side of the bed.

It had turned very cold and dreary after the lovely weather of the preceding week, and there was a melancholy in the roar of the waves, which, as the moan of an unquiet spirit, would enter within that silent room, illuminated but by the glow from the fire, which cast fantastic shapes around, thus adding to the weirdness of the surroundings.

"I shall never see the Manor again," Miss Musgrove repeated, "and there is something I want much to say to you, Reginald, before the end comes."

"Don't talk like that, dear Miss Musgrove," the latter replied. "You are ill and weak now, but there is no reason that you should not recover."

"A vain hope, a vain hope," she returned; "but so that I leave my darling happy, I have no wish to stay," and she turned to where Elise, with the tears starting to her eyes, knelt beside her, when again looking towards the Captain, "I had hoped, Reginald," she said—"may I not hope still?"

But Reginald Kerson could do no more than press the thin, wrinkled hand, a shade of sorrow passing over his features, while the words he would have uttered remain unsaid, as, the door opening, the sisters entered.

They bore traces of the fatigue and anxiety they had experienced in their long journey, on which they had started immediately on receipt of the telegram; but no persuasion could prevail on them to take either rest or refreshment until they had been led to the bedside of the sufferer, when after each having kissed the young girl, who rose to throw her arms round their necks, they told her and Reginald Kerson to go and get a breath of fresh air, whilst they would remain with the invalid.

During the week which followed there was little change, but the end came when least expected, when after days, in which the latter appeared to know no pain, the sands of life gradually running out peacefully to the last, they were all summoned to the bed of death.

Miss Musgrove had just awoke from a quiet sleep, the last one she would know, until the cold grave closed her from the world. The doctor had told them all it was useless to hide the truth, that she was sinking fast, so fast that he considered it doubtful if she would ever see another sun.

"Don't grieve, my darling!" she said, whilst her hand passed lovingly over the bright glossy curls.

She could no longer see, and Elise sobbed out her sorrow with her face buried in the coverlet.

"Don't grieve, my pain will soon be over, and I am an old woman, glad to go; and Heaven grant, darling, that you, with all your life before you, may be as happy as I have been in mine! Where is Reginald?" she asked. "I can't see, and there is something I would say before I go. Bend low," she said faintly, as the latter approached; and then,

August 28, 1886.

with his ear placed close to her lips, she whispered to him what was in her heart; but to those who surrounded the bed the words were inaudible, whilst when Reginald raised his head it was well that those eyes, from which the light had fled for ever, were unconscious of the look of agony which then passed over his features—features from which all the youth had fled, leaving his face drawn and lined like that of an old man.

Without a word he approached to where Elfie still sobbed out her grief. She had kissed for the last time the lips of the dying woman, whose breath became shorter and shorter, the sisters alone pressing closer as the end came near.

"Come along, Elfie," he said to the weeping girl, "it was her wish darling," and he pointed to where, with her eyes already fixed in death, her aunt gasped out the last breath of life, and then all was still.

"Oh! Captain Kerson, it was my fault. I kept her out too long that night when she caught the cold which has killed her!" and Elfie cried as though her heart would break.

"Don't be silly," Captain Kerson answered. "It was through no fault of yours, my darling. There was no hope for her before she left Singlethorpe, although the stay here has prolonged her days" and leading her to a seat by the fire, he bade her to be seated.

"You will be making yourself ill next," he said, tenderly.

And when Elfie raised her tear-stained face to his there was that in the expression of his countenance she could not mistake, and the colour flushed beneath her olive skin, dyeing cheeks and forehead with carnation hue, and she knew too well that her young heart had gone out to that man, who loved her as he had never loved before.

"Elfie, my darling—my darling!" he said, and passing his hand over her sunny head, as the dead woman upstairs had done but a few moments before, he gazed on her for a second; then with a sudden impulse he threw himself at her feet, drawing her nearer—nearer until their lips met, and he whispered in her ear the love he could no longer conceal.

The next moment he started, as on the door opening to admit the sisters, who, now that all was over, had descended from the chamber of death, the sound of a woman's voice fall on his ear.

It was someone on the landing upon which their rooms opened, making inquiries respecting apartments; but it was enough to cause the colour to forsake the face of the young officer, as with one look at Elfie, who had risen from her seat when her aunts entered, he sank into a chair, with a strong effort controlling the emotion under which he was evidently suffering.

"It is all over, poor dear!" Miss Sarah said, alluding to her dead sister, whilst Eleanor could not speak for the grief which overwhelmed her, which Elfie alone seemed to have the power to assuage.

"Don't auntie, dear—don't!" she said, soothingly, as sob on sob broke from the elder woman's breast, until at last she became quiet in her great sorrow.

"We should wish the body removed as soon as practicable, Reginald," Miss Sarah continued, "for I could not think of her being buried anywhere but in the family vault."

"I will see to all that for you!" was the reply; "and, indeed, Captain Kerson was only too glad to have something which would draw his mind from brooding over troubles which unkind fate had woven around him. The more he was with Elfie the greater became the temptation to cast aside the scruples which, until now, had stood in the way of his happiness; and he determined, in his mind, when once Miss Musgrove had been placed in the vault of her ancestors, that he would carry out her last wish," and as these thoughts passed through his mind the gloom which late events had cast over him as quickly disappeared.

He no longer restrained from telling Elfie

of the love without which she had made him to feel life was not worth living; but of the past he had not, as yet, the courage to speak to her, whilst she alone, cognisant of the fact that his love was more to her than aught else, lived on in the knowledge of that happiness, which was her life, her all.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE SURPRISE.

As Captain Kerson promised, he had arranged all for the removal of the corpse to Singlethorpe, to where a telegram had been dispatched, followed by a letter giving full instructions when and how the same would arrive, whilst the family would be there by a later train, and then for the last time he and Elfie took a stroll by the sea-shore.

It was a sad ending to the trip towards which but a short time since she had looked forward with such delight; but youth quickly outlives sorrow, and with this new-born happiness Elfie had almost ceased to remember the loss which had come to her.

"Would you grieve much, Elfie, should any thing come between us?"

It was Captain Kerson who asked the question, and raising her eyes to his he could see them become filled with tears at the thoughts the words suggested; but they soon passed away, for did she not feel his warm breath on her face, as in low tones mingling with the murmur of the ocean, he told her how dear she was to him, and that how dear her life would not be worth living!

"No woman has ever been to me what you are, Elfie," he said; "you believe me, don't you, darling?"

And Elfie did believe him, and would have done so in spite of any proof to the contrary; but what was it that her dead aunt meant about the skeleton in every house, when she had asked her what made him seem so sad? And Elfie felt she could not restrain from asking him of the sorrow in his past, but the words she would have uttered died on her lips. It would seem like doubting him, she thought. No, she would ask nothing; whatever he had to tell that she should know should come spontaneously from himself.

The sisters were awaiting them on their return, it was growing late, and too cold for Elfie to be out; besides, she would have to be up early in the morning, they said, so after a few moments the latter bade them good-night, leaving Reginald looking over the time table, studying the trains for the next day.

"Have you seen that woman Reginald?" Miss Sarah asked when the door had closed on Elfie. "She is positively here, in the same hotel," and the former looked as though it was astonishing that the roof which covered both had not fallen in on either.

Captain Kerson was perfectly aware who was meant by that woman, so asked no more than that Miss Musgrove was certain such was the case.

"Certain I of course I am," that lady replied, forgetting, for the time being, aught else. "Why, my dress actually brushed against hers on the stairs, and she shook her skirts, to get rid of any contamination she might have derived in the contact; so even in that you see they have deceived you."

"Did my poor sister know of this?" Eleanor asked, looking pityingly on the young officer, whose worst fears had thus become realised.

"I don't think so," was the reply. And then he told them of the dead woman's last wish and his own shattered hopes.

"I must leave it with Elfie and your own sense of honour, Captain Kerson," Miss Sarah said, after a pause; "but she must know all, remember, all!"

"I never intended that it should be otherwise, Miss Musgrove," was the reply. "Even had the report brought to me been true, Elfie should have known everything before she linked her fate with mine."

"I know we can trust you, Peggy," the former replied, grasping his extended hand and smilingly looking into his face, all the old confidence restored; and, adding a last good-night, he turned with a sad heart to leave the room, when the door was opened gently from without, and Elfie herself stood before them.

She had on a loose *peignoir*, her long black hair falling as a veil over her shoulders; her face was white as marble, and the lamp she carried trembled in her grasp.

"Come upstairs, auntie," she said, hurriedly; "come quick." And, without waiting to notice the effect her words had on the officer, or even to acknowledge his presence, she retraced her steps, followed by Sarah, who told the others to stay until her return.

Hastily they ascended the stairs. It was but a short flight, leading on to the corridor, on which the doors of their rooms opened.

Without a word, invoking silence to her aunt, who followed on, she gently opened the one belonging to the chamber where the body of Miss Musgrove remained, awaiting its early removal in the morning.

The coffin was placed on low trestles at the further end of the apartment, the latter being redolent with the scent of flowers, which loving hands had placed on and about the same, whilst a single wax candle cast a weird light over all, creating a deeper gloom around the corners it could not penetrate.

A sound of someone crying bitterly fell on their ears, and pushing the door noiselessly open, Sarah could not suppress a start on seeing a figure bending over the dead form of her sister, whilst a woman's voice sobbed forth its grief.

She had removed the covering from the cold and lifeless face, on which she impressed passionate kisses, unconscious of another's presence until Miss Sarah's voice fell on her ears; then with a start she raised her head, dashing aside all traces of her recent emotion.

"A thousand pardons!" she said; "I mistook the room;" and then, without another word, she passed by aunt and niece, the former unable to find her voice, whilst she looked almost dazed as she gazed on the lovely face before her, Elfie trembling the while, recognising in the intruder the woman she had seen on the beach.

"Why did she come here, aunt?" she asked. "I am sure she knows you and poor auntie." And then she told Miss Sarah of their former meeting.

"Yes, dear," the latter replied, "there was a time when we loved her fondly; but it is a long story, Elfie, and the hour is late. But how came you to find her here?"

"I felt I could not go to bed until I had taken one last look at dear auntie," was the response, "and was about to enter this room for that purpose, when I heard someone crying over the coffin. It frightened me so much; the more so that I could only see a figure bending and swaying in great grief, and no more. But do tell me all about her."

"I will, dearest," was the rejoinder; "but not now. You must retire, for you know we have to be early in the morning."

So, after again placing the cover over the face they loved so well, Elfie was led by her aunt from the chamber of death to the little room, where, with her head resting on the snowy pillow, she was soon asleep.

Eleanor and the Captain were anxiously awaiting the elder lady's return.

"Poor girl," said the former, when Miss Sarah had related what had occurred. "Thank Heaven, there is some good left in her yet! It seems as if it were the hand of Providence which led her to take up her residence at the same hotel. Didn't she say anything else?"

"Not a word," Eleanor replied, "merely something about having mistaken the room, and then she passed out to her own."

"And of course Elfie knows?" Captain Kerson asked.

"At present nothing; though, naturally, her curiosity is excited," was the answer

Eleanor gave, as, saying they were all tired, she told him he must go or they would all be ill.

CHAPTER VI.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

It was early on the next morning when the sisters were awake, the undertaker coming punctually to the hour stated to screw down the lid of the coffin, and thus close for ever from their sight the beloved dead! It was agreed between them that Elsie should not be disturbed till later on, and the sun was shining brightly when the latter opened her eyes, to find the others already awaiting her.

"Why didn't you let me be called before, auntie?" she asked, when, entering their private sitting-room, she discovered that they had long breakfasted, a fresh supply of ham and eggs being ordered on her making her appearance.

"My dear, there is plenty of time," they replied, returning the kiss she gave; "as we don't go until the midday train, and I was sure you were tired."

Captain Kerson's name was not mentioned, although Elsie longed to know if he had been there yet, anxiously watching every opening of the door, in the hope that he would enter; but at last the well-known footstep fell on her ear, and Reginald shortly after entered the room.

He looked jaded and worn, his eyelids heavy and swollen from the effects of sleeplessness, but there was a sad tenderness in his tone, when, after having shaken hands with the elder ladies, he advanced to her side.

"The train starts at 12.30; will you be ready?" he asked. "I have ordered a carriage to be here a little after the hour, so that we shall not be hurried."

The words were addressed to all, but his eyes were watching every glance, every movement, of the girl's face, whilst pressing the hand she had held out to him.

"I will meet you at the station, Miss Musgrove," he said; "you won't mind, will you?"

"No, decidedly not," she answered, knowing full well why it was he would not go with them from the hotel, and so after a short time saying he wanted to make one or two purchases previous to starting, he bade them adieu, as he said, for the present.

The carriage at the appointed time drove up, and it was not long before Elsie and her aunts took their seats in the same.

They had seen no more of the strange woman previous to their departure, and in the bustle attendant on their leaving, all thoughts of her appeared to have passed from their minds.

Captain Kerson was on the platform awaiting their arrival. He had seen to everything for their comfort, even to procuring the tickets.

"It is now twenty-five minutes past, and the train is timed for the half-hour, so you may as well take your seats," he said, offering his arm to Miss Musgrove, Elsie and Eleanor following to where a carriage, with "engaged" on the window, had been secured for them; and then he brought out a book, a daily paper, and one or two others, to beguile the time during the long journey.

"They are not very punctual," he said, after having seen that the ladies were comfortable.

He stayed by the door awaiting the signal for them to start, but the half-hour, five minutes, and another five after that went by, and, as yet, no sign of leaving, until, growing impatient of the delay, Reginald advanced to the first porter he could see.

"I thought this train was to start at half-past twelve?" he said; "and here it is a quarter to one, and no sign of moving. I wonder there are not more accidents on this line. It is shameful!"

"They are a-waitin' for the express," the

man answered, not forgetting to attach an *h*; "but here she be."

And as he spoke the express dashed into the station, and Reginald had but just time to jump into his compartment when, with a shriek and a puff, they moved from the same.

Their conversation was but limited, owing to the noise made by their own and passing trains, and, apparently, each had more or less become absorbed in their reading; but even that, by the jolting of the carriages, became almost impossible, and it was not long before the elder ladies fell into a doze.

Elsie was seated close to her lover, with whom she conversed in low tones, until, at length, she also becoming drowsy, leant her head on his broad shoulder, where, after a few moments, she fell into a peaceful slumber.

How long they had so remained they could not say. Reginald alone awake, watching, as in a dream, the fields, and, at times, the chalk banks, which, with the little country stations, appeared to fly from them, whilst they flew on faster, faster, with now and then a shrill whistle, like a scream of delight, sounding from the thing which bore them on, when another train, with its freight of human life, would dash wildly by, and again, unheeding all but the time thus gained, on, on, whilst labourers would for a moment rest from their work to gaze on the line of black which came and went ere they could realize the fact. And then, a roar, a crash, and chaos, the shrieks of the living, the moans of the dying mingling with the last scream of the engine, when rolling on its mighty side it went, dragging with it the carriages, which, broken and shattered, buried beneath their weight their helpless victims.

The Misses Musgrove knew nothing of their danger until they awoke, rudely tossed on the floor of the compartment they occupied, a severe shaking the only injury they had received; whilst Elsie, whom fright had momentarily deprived of consciousness, lay white, and apparently lifeless, in the arms of the Captain.

To assist them all from the broken *débris* was the first care of the latter, when, gently laying the fainting girl on a bank, with a prayer of thankfulness to the Almighty for having saved their lives in the midst of death, he left her in the charge of her aunts, whilst he went to render what assistance he could to the remainder.

Fortunately, a doctor, who was travelling in the same train, had escaped unhurt, and was doing all he could to alleviate the sufferings of the injured, whilst the groans and moans of the dying were filling the air with their agony.

Willing workers were quickly on the scene, dragging men, women, and children from beneath the wreckage, and Reginald had just turned from where a young mother, with her babe, had been laid down gently on the hillside; she was dead, quite dead, and it was only a moment that he gazed on the still, white face, when two men advanced with yet another ghastly burden; and as they laid her down—for it was a woman—with an unaccountable desire to see if she were also gone, he stooped to look on the features, when, with a cry he was unable to restrain, he fell on his knees to chafe the hands of the sufferer, to call on her by name, to open her eyes and look on him, and hear that she was forgiven ere she went.

It was then that the voice she had once so fondly loved seemed to draw her back to life, as, with a slight quiver of the eyelids, they unclosed; for one moment she looked into the face so near her own, when, with a last effort to meet the one last kiss so freely bestowed, she sank back a senseless corpse.

He arose from the cold damp ground, he had no further reason then to stay; all that had made his life an endless sorrow was finished now; all anger had vanished from his breast, pity alone remaining for the lifeless clay at his feet, and turning his back he was about to quit the scene, when he became con-

sious of another who was looking down on the dead white face, and as in raising his head their eyes met, they read in each a hatred which would never die.

Another train soon arrived, and but a short time elapsed when they were once again steaming towards the metropolis; the elder ladies had almost recovered their composure, whilst Elsie pale and trembling was half led, half carried to the carriage in which Reginald tenderly placed her.

He could not bring himself then to tell her of the woman who with the other dead was conveyed to where the bodies would await identification, she who but a few short hours before had been, in the fulness of life and health, kneeling beside the coffin of her dearest friend.

CHAPTER VII.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

"No, no, let us get home quickly, auntie, dear," was Elsie's earnest entreaty, Captain Kerson having proposed that they should remain in London the next day; and her request being granted, they left by an early train for Singlethorpe.

A cold drizzling rain was falling when they once again entered the gates of the Manor, around which all appeared sad and dreary, the house itself looking so dismal with all the blinds drawn, and the wind moaning in wistful gusts around its gables and soughing in the bare branches of the trees overhead.

In the room she had but a few short weeks since left in life, was placed the coffin of the dead sister awaiting burial, the funeral being arranged to take place on the following day.

All but Elsie had suffered no ill-effects from the railway collision, but with her it proved different. At first she seemed dazed, scarcely realising the danger which they had been in, and then she became the prey of fever, when in her fancies, she felt more than in the moment of real peril.

"Shock to the system!" Dr. Partridge averred, when Sarah had asked his opinion, having lost no time in commanding his attendance.

He had been medical adviser to the family at the Manor ever since the three maiden ladies were girls like Elsie herself, and the old man felt a genuine regret, when after leaving the sick room of the latter, they led him to where Miss Musgrove lay in her last narrow bed.

"Very sad, very sad, indeed," he said, and then he went on to congratulate them on their narrow escape.

"And you really do not think there is anything very serious the matter with our niece?" Miss Sarah asked.

"I think not," was the reply; "quiet and good nursing will, I hope, in a few days do wonders."

But day succeeded day, and still Elsie tossed and turned on a sick bed, but at last she was pronounced out of danger.

Captain Kerson was like one demented whilst the life of his darling hung in the balance, she failing to recognise the tones of his voice, or the touch of his hand when he would place it cool and gentle on her burning forehead; and it was at these times that he would go from her room, his big heart breaking, when he saw as he thought the life, which had become so a part of his own, slowly ebbing away.

Three weeks had thus passed when once again the dark velvety eyes opened with the light of reason. Miss Sarah was in the room, the sisters seemingly jealous of each other in their attendance on the sick bed of their darling, having agreed to watch by turns.

"Have I been very ill, auntie?"

The former turned with a glad smile as Elsie in her natural tones thus addressed her.

"Yes, dear, you have been very ill," she replied, "but, thank Heaven, you are better now."

August 28, 1886.

For a few moments after she was again quiet, whilst ever and anon she passed her thin-transparent hand over her eyes, seemingly to remove the mist still hanging over her memory.

"Do you want anything, dearest?" Miss Sarah asked.

"No, auntie no," the girl replied, "but I was thinking how it was that I came here;" then, with a shudder as the recollection of past events came to her, "Ah! I remember," she said, "poor aunt Matilda's death, the railway accident, and then no more; but where are we now?"

"You are in your own little room at the Manor, my child."

"And Captain Kerson?" she asked.

There was a dread in her tone that the answer might bring her fresh sorrow, but when her aunt told her how he had been to see her day after day, when she was unconscious of his presence, a glad light came into her eyes, and Miss Sarah leaving her in the care of the nurse, hastened from the room to inform her sister of the happy change.

"May I see her at once?" Captain Kerson asked, who having called in the interim, was chatting with Eleanor when the former entered with her glad news.

"Yes," she replied, with a smile, "but you must promise not to excite her, for the prostration against which we have now to fight is almost as difficult a task as the other."

So it was very noiselessly that a few moments later Reginald was ushered into the sick room.

A faint flush came to the face of the girl when, on her aunt telling her that some one had come to see her, her eyes fell on the form of the young officer.

"Oh! so glad, so glad," she said, holding out her hands, and drawing his face down until his tawny moustache brushed her sunken cheek, and he pressed hot kisses on her lips, parched and dry from the late fever."

"Now we must be very quiet," he said, with ludicrous clemency, as he moistened her mouth with the hothouse grapes he had brought with him, "or Aunt Sarah will send me away like a naughty boy!"

"No, no!" she answered, while a smile of happiness flitted over her countenance. "Oh! I am so happy—so happy!"

"And so am I, my darling!" was the reply, as he smoothed her curls, her head the while resting on his broad shoulder; and then he told her that she must make haste and get well, for he was waiting for his little wife.

There was no hesitation now in his tone, his eyes no longer wearing that sad look to which she had been so accustomed, and as she lovingly gazed on his features there returned to her memory the mystery which had hitherto enveloped his life.

Was it that no longer existed, she pondered, when a short time after with a tender kiss, and promise to see her on the morrow, he had, at her aunt's suggestion, left the room; and she wondered if the strange woman at Ilfracombe, whose presence seemed to influence his conduct, had anything to do with the skeleton in his home, of which her dead aunt had spoken.

And then it all came back to her mind—the watch in the chamber of death, and the sobs which had broken so suddenly on her senses, to be as quickly subdued when her presence had been detected, and Elsie determined to ask her aunt the solution of the mystery.

But from neither could she gain a promise that they would grant her request.

"When you are quite well, Elsie, you shall know all," they told her, and with that she had to remain satisfied, whilst day by day she was quickly recovering, until at last the roses once more bloomed on her pale cheek, and her merry laugh again re-echoed within the Manor walls.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BAD STORY.

"There must be no secrets between us," Captain Kerson was saying, when some weeks later the ladies were entering with him on the subject of his approaching marriage with their niece. "Elise must know all," he persisted, and so, in spite of the sister's opinion that it was unnecessary to rouse up the ashes of the dead, it was agreed that she should learn all from her aunts, they having been, in a way, mixed up in the same.

It was a bitter cold evening at the commencement of December, which enhanced to a degree the comfort surrounding the Manor drawing-room, where a huge coal fire threw its warmth and glow over the whole apartment.

Without the snow lay thick on lawn and terrace, whilst a bitter East wind drove the flakes before it, till they formed great heaps against the palisades which divided the former from the garden, where in summer flowers of every hue exhaled their fragrance.

Elsie had left the piano, where in the dark hour it was her custom to sing, whilst her aunts would dreamily, half asleep, half awake, listen to the tones of her rich contralto voice; but this night she had soon become weary of the old songs—when leaving the instrument she nestled close to the side of the former.

For a time all were silent that even the girl herself might have been supposed to have fallen into a gentle slumber, but her thoughts wandering from recent events to those which had occurred in the days which were passed, a sudden desire to have the mystery of those days revealed came to her.

"You will, auntie dear, won't you?" she asked, appealing to Miss Sarah, "tell me the story you promised to do when I was quite well again? Reginald would have told me himself this morning, but I would rather hear it from you," she added.

"Perhaps it would be better that you should know all, my darling," was the reply, "but I shall have to go back to many years ago, which had not been for circumstances which have occurred during the last few months, would have remained, as far as I am concerned, a sealed book."

"No, you need not light the lamp, Maria," she said, as a servant entered the room for that purpose. "I will ring when I desire it," after which, stirring the fire into a blaze, with Elsie's head resting on her knee, Miss Mungrove commenced.

"I must go back sixteen years, to the time when with our father we and your father lived together beneath this roof; but it was not long before the former followed his wife, who had died but a few months previous, and we sisters and brother were then left the sole occupants.

"After a few months Edward married, and not listening a moment to the idea of our quitting the Manor in favour of his bride, he selected a home for her in the metropolis; but this arrangement not falling in with the wishes of your mother, we seldom met, and were never, as you know, good friends.

"However, she consoled herself with the prospect of soon being born, who would eventually be master here; but even in that she was doomed to disappointment, as we knew when we heard of your birth, and had it not been for Edward himself, we should never have known our little niece, her wish being that you should never enter the Manor during our lifetime.

"Amongst our acquaintances at Singlethorpe at that time was a Colonel Kerson, who with his family resided but a short distance from us; and we were on the most friendly terms, often bringing Reginald, then a lad of fifteen, with us to stay at the Manor, the only time when he was permitted, to his great delight, to handle a gun; besides which we having adopted as our own a little orphan whose mother had been a schoolfellow in our

young days, the children became devotedly attached to each other, and were always delighted at the prospect of being in each other's society.

"Florrie was then but nine years of age, a golden-haired fairy with large blue eyes, and a skin fair as alabaster.

"She was a great pet with all, but mostly so with Matilda, who idolised her.

"Thus five years passed away. Reginald had entered the army, and being with his regiment, for a time we saw but little of him.

"I expect my boy home next month," Colonel Kerson told us one morning, "he has obtained three months' leave, previous to his leaving for India."

"India!" Florrie exclaimed, whilst the flush of pleasure which had swept over her fair face suddenly vanished, leaving her white as marble; and then I saw the tears well to her beautiful eyes.

"However, she controlled her emotions so far, never breaking down until we were again alone, when throwing her lovely arms round my sister's neck, she sobbed as though her heart would break.

"But at length she became calmer, looking forward anxiously to the day when Reginald should arrive, who, as I well knew he would, came to the Manor without a moment's delay; and during the three months which intervened, with the consent of both families, they became engaged to each other.

"The last few days of his stay were drawing to a close, and we were quite prepared to see Florrie overwhelmed with grief at the prospect of the parting so close at hand; but, to our surprise, she was as merry as a cricket, only more than ever in the society of her lover, and we were little prepared for the scene which followed, when, the morning previous to the departure of the young officer, the Colonel himself appeared.

"He was in a towering rage—a fact he did not attempt to conceal—and even so far forgot himself as to accuse us of complicity in the ruin, as he termed it, of his boy's prospects.

"As we told him, we were entirely ignorant of what he meant, when cooling down a little, he told us that how, at the earnest entreaty of his betrothed, Reginald had resigned his commission, and thus thrown away a glorious future.

"So surprised were we at this announcement that we could scarcely find words to express the regret we felt at the turn affairs had taken; but as what was done could not be undone, we thought it useless to argue the point further.

"He shall never enter my doors again!" was the exclamation of our choleric friend, and he kept his word; but it was only a matter of a few days that Reginald was banished from the parental roof, for scarcely had a week passed when he was hastily summoned to the death-bed of the old soldier, who died in a fit of apoplexy, his wife surviving him but a short two months after.

"Poor Reginald was in great grief at the trials which had so suddenly overwhelmed him; but time and the many duties which, owing to the same, devolved upon him, roused him from his sorrow, and six months after he had performed the last rites to his dead parents he became the husband of our Florrie.

"We were very happy then, their home being but a short distance from our own; scarcely a day intervened that we did not see one or the other.

"They had now been married two years, when Reginald accidentally coming across a friend he had known when in the service, in a fatal moment he asked him to pay him a visit during the hot season, when life in London was unbearable.

"Lord Ingleton was many years the senior of his host, and the marked attentions he paid our beautiful Florrie was on that score only looked upon as such—that a man of his years could with impunity bestow on one who to him was little more than a child, and we

little dreamed of the evil which was brewing, until as an avalanche we became buried beneath its weight.

"I shall never forget the morning that the sad truth was made known to us. It was June; we were sitting by the open window through which the lovely scent of the roses, then in full bloom, was carried by the soft wind. Looking up from the embroidery on which I was engaged I saw Reginald advancing to where we sat, and though so long ago, I can see him as I saw him then—his face literally convulsed with the emotion he was undergoing, his eyes starting from his head, whilst his whole frame shook visibly with the excitement under which he was labouring.

"What is the matter?" we asked simultaneously, when after entering through the open window he returned our greeting, and then sank into the nearest chair, covering his face with his hands, whilst groans of agony proceeded from his lips.

"He could not control himself sufficiently at first to answer our question, but holding to us a small note which he had so brushed in his first great anger that the writing was almost unintelligible, we read sufficient to know the worst, the story of a friend's perfidy and a woman's weakness, and the letter dropped from our grasp, we almost as overcome as himself at the contents.

"May the curses of heaven follow him wherever he goes!" he exclaimed at last, whilst the veins on his forehead stood out like big cords; but Matilda gently laying her hand upon his own,

"Hush!" she said, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."

"And then when he became quieter we learnt how Florrie had left husband, home—all for the sake of a man who, by his subtle flattery, his title and his wealth, had lured her from the path of virtue.

"He who had so much," Reginald groaned, "and I but my pet ewe lamb!" when again burying his face in his hands, he endeavoured to hide the grief which had so unmanned him.

"What do you intend doing?" we asked, but he made no definite reply, and then he left us.

"After that he came one day to bid us goodbye. He was going abroad, he said, pending the divorce suit he had instituted, and for months we saw no more of him, nor heard of our darling.

"When he did return it was as a free man, not that we ever named the subject to him, but we read of the proceedings in the papers, and Florrie became Lady Ingleton. After that Reginald resumed his usual habits; but the effects of the blow he had received never left him, but there ever remained on his countenance the expression of sorrow which was still in his heart.

"One day he appeared sadder than usual, Florrie was dead," he said, and then he showed us a paragraph cut from a foreign journal containing the statement that, owing to an accident when out driving, an English nobleman, Lord Ingleton and his lady had been seriously injured, and then one of a later date, regretting the death of the latter. From whom they came, we never knew; it was a strange handwriting, and had been seen evidently by some one who knew the story.

"There is so much to occupy our minds in this life," Miss Sarah continued, "that the dead are soon forgotten and Florrie's name was scarcely ever mentioned in the three years that followed, when the loss of our only brother, your father, filled our thoughts, and then you came."

"And Reginald loved this woman so much, auntie," Elsie asked raising her head, whilst there was a tinge of jealousy in her tone.

"He did, my darling, but when the idel was smashed at his feet, he cared no longer to pick up the pieces; he pitied her, but nothing would ever have induced him to have restored to her the once held in his heart and home, whilst his sense of honour would have prevented him from making another

his wife whilst she lived; and, strange to say, he always had a presentiment that she was not dead, although we tried to convince him to the contrary."

There then occurred to Elsie the moments in which she could not account for the sudden change in his manner towards her.

"And does she still live, do you think, auntie?" she asked, but before Miss Sarah could reply Captain Kerson himself appeared on the scene, when, after a short time, remembering that they had some important writing to do before supper, the former with her sister left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARBLE CROSS.

"And what is it auntie has been saying, which has made my little one look so sad?" he asked, as the door closed behind the ladies, and drawing Elsie towards him, he gazed lovingly on her upturned face.

"What it was your wish that I should know," she answered; and then he knew that she had learnt the sad history of his life.

"And you are still willing to take me, Elsie?" he asked, whilst he looked wistfully into her velvety eyes; but before answering him,

"Is she still alive," she said.

"No, Elsie, no!" was the reply. "Poor Florrie went to her long account on that night when on the hill-side, amid the dying and the dead, I looked on her for the last time. Had I known she lived I should never have told you of the love which had grown in my heart. You remember, dear, the day we started for Devonshire, and how through me you missed the train? It was then that I knew she was still alive. She was on the platform when I was selecting some papers at the bookstall, and, advancing to where I was standing, begged me, in the name of Heaven, to speak to her. At first I told her it was impossible, but to her further entreaty, and fearing to attract attention, I at last agreed, when retiring to where we could converse unnoticed, I asked her to be brief, as friends were awaiting my return."

"It is to ask your forgiveness," she said, "that I have begged to speak to you!"

"It is too late to do that," I answered. "I thought—indeed, I hoped," I added, falteringly; "that our miserable lives were severed for ever—that you were—"

"Dead!" she said, finishing the sentence for me. "Oh, Heaven! I wish I was!" and she looked so utterly miserable that for the moment my heart bled for her.

"Yes," she went on. "I wanted you to believe me so, and had the paragraph inserted to that effect that the same might be forwarded to you!"

"To what end?" I asked.

"That you might, if you chose, take a wife more worthy of you than I was, which I knew whilst I lived you never would!" she returned.

"But you are Lady Ingleton. Why should you give a thought to me?" I said, sarcastically.

"It was all I could do," she answered, "in reparation of the great wrong I had done you; but if to know that my life now is one long season of misery and regret will satisfy you, your revenge is complete!"

"I looked up as she spoke, and indeed there were lines on her beautiful face which told but too plainly that in that, at least, she spake the truth, whilst hereyeyes became suffused with tears. "Lord Ingleton, your husband, is he not kind then?" I ventured.

"Hush! I hate him!" was her reply, and then she turned, leaving me where I was, dimly gazing to where, in the distance, I saw her rejoin his lordship, and leaning on his arm after a few moments she again passed me; but the former never noticed my presence, whilst the ripple of her laughter, forced though I knew it to be, was the last sound that fell on my ears.

"And you never saw her from then till she was killed in the accident?" Elsie asked.

"Yes, dear, when we were on the beach at Ilfracombe," was the response, and then the latter knew his wife and the beautiful woman she had discovered weeping so bitterly over her aunt's coffin were one and the same.

A servant then entering to say that supper was ready, and the ladies were awaiting them in the dining-room, they were quickly aroused from the reverie into which both had fallen, whilst they became sensible of a chilliness, the fire having burnt so low as to be scarcely perceptible.

"I will not stay longer," Reginald said, in answer to Miss Sarah's entreaty that he would stop at the Manor till the morning. "My housekeeper will be waiting up for me, and as it has left off snowing now, if you will allow me I will say good-night at once," and a few moments later, after tenderly kissing Elsie, telling her he should call and take her for a walk in the morning, he went out into the bitter cold.

As the door closed behind him the latter went to the window, from which she could see his dark figure in the bright moonlight, until in the distance it became lost in the woods beyond, and a short time after her glossy head was resting on the snowy pillow of her little bed, dreaming of a happy future with him who was so dear to her.

And Reginald thoughtful, and feeling happier than he had done for years, moved on over the trackless waste of unbroken snow on which the moon shone in all her brilliancy, bathing lawn and cope in her effulgent ray—the little village church beyond around which the graves of the dead showed in peaceful quietude.

Not a sound was audible, the crushing of the frozen snow beneath his feet the only break in the surrounding stillness.

Taking his way through the churchyard, as being the nearest to his destination, he went on dreaming of the girl with whom he looked forward to spend a life of happiness to which he had been a stranger so long, when he became conscious of something he had never seen before in the midst of the silent tombs surrounding him.

It was a cross of pure white marble, marking the last resting-place of one who, in worldly goods, had been more favoured than the rest; and an indefinable impulse leading him to the spot, he read in the light as clear as day, which fell on the golden letters, the name of the girl who had thrown such a shadow over his early life; but as the pure stone seemed to speak to him but of the time when, spotless as itself, she had come to him in the freshness of her youth and beauty, for a moment he let his hand rest lovingly on the roses which, as a wreath, entwined the holy symbol, and then with his eyes filled with tears he arose, and his own voice caused him to start; it sounded so cold, so repulsive, where all else was so still, as saying,—

"How came it here?"

He rose to his feet, and then great beads of perspiration fell from his forehead as the answer came when least expected, and the words, "By my desire!" fell on his ear.

He turned to whence the sound proceeded, to find he was not the sole visitor to that lone churchyard, and then he saw standing close to the place he had but just quitted, with his arms folded across his breast, the man who had so embittered his youth, the enemy of his life, Lord Ingleton.

The temptation to spring on him and strangle him where he stood was his first impulse; but as the pure white cross arose betwixt them, a better, a holier feeling took possession of his breast; and, as though her spirit arose in mediation, Reginald's hand dropped to his side, whilst he gazed in sorrow alone on the man before him.

"I know what is in your heart, Reginald Kerson," the other said; "and if my life would atone for the past, it is yours. All that I lived for lies there," and he pointed to the grave, around which the snow wreaths had

gathered. "It was her wish to be brought to Singlethorpe, and only to see that the stone I sent from London had been placed according to my directions am I here. To-morrow I shall be away early! It is such a one as she would have liked, don't you think so?" he asked, sadly.

"And you really loved her?" Reginald said, whilst a sudden pity for the man who stood there in his great sorrow filled his breast.

"Better than life," he answered, with a grief he could not control. He clung to the stone tablet, lovingly caressing the flowers drooping as she had drooped in their full beauty.

It was only a moment, when, as though he regretted the weakness which had overcome him,

"Good night," he said. "I am going now. We were friends once! Will you take my hand for the last time?"

He had held it out tremulously, fearing the result.

But Reginald grasped it in his own.

"May Heaven forgive you!" he answered. "I do!"

And then they parted—parted over the grave of her whom both had loved so madly!"

CONCLUSION.

LITTLE more remains to be told. Again it is spring time, and the Singlethorpe woods resound with the songs of the feathered minstrels.

The Misses Musgrave are seated in the same room as when our tale commenced, and very happy they look; whilst Elfie, who now forms the trio, is urging a point which, by the expression on the faces of the elder ladies, she will evidently gain.

"Well, my darling!" Miss Sarah says at last, "it shall be as you wish, though I did say your mother should never enter the Manor again; but we must forget and forgive!"

And so Edward's wife was forgiven the act (which, in her sisters-in-law eyes amounted to a crime) of marrying again, an invitation being at once sent off that she would be present herself at her daughter's wedding.

There was quite a sensation in the Singlethorpe village when the latter took place, a triumphal arch being erected under the supervision of the village carpenter, from which to the church itself were strewn flowers by the white-robed children of the village school, as the bells rang out a joyous peal, and Elfie, leaning on the arm of Captain Kerson, emerged from the sacred edifice.

Ten years have sped their course since then, and Elfie, with her husband and eight-year son, have taken up their abode at the Manor, for Aunt Eleanore is alone now, and she says their young voices are all that remain to her of happiness.

[THE END.]

A SECRET SIN.

—:— CHAPTER XXXIV.

SLOWLY and solemnly Bernard Vansittart was carried by the two young officers back to the Gatehouse—the only home which as a lonely boy he had ever known. All their fierce disgust and horror were merged in infinite pity, as they laid him down on the sofa in the breakfast-room.

The doctor, who had been sent for to attend Lucy Mitford, said all was over. By his last, rash act he had gone beyond the reach of earthly science or earthly judgment, and in one instant his sin-stained soul had passed beyond the circle of mortality into the presence of his Maker.

Sir Roger stood like a statue at the head of the sofa, with his thin hands clasped on the handle of his stick. Not a word passed his lips, but he bent his head as a sign that he heard what the doctor said, perhaps thinking that he knew it all beforehand. His face was stern as well as sad. He felt that having known the sad history of Bernard's father, he might have given more care and thought to the son.

Pera, utterly unshamed by her cousin's awful death, leant against the doorway, sobbing convulsively, whilst Bertie Vyvyan kept casting a furtive glance towards her, his heart brimful of sympathy which he dared not utter.

Old Thomas stood in the hall, wringing his hands, and muttering, whilst the tears ran down his cheeks,—

"I've known him since a boy, and to think the young master should come to this! Only to think of it! Lord, ha' mercy upon us!"

"We had better slope," Val said, in a low voice.

Bertie nodded, and looked round at the Baronet.

"We are bound to be back at barracks, Sir Roger. Is there anything we can do for you in Warburton?"

"Thank you, I'm very grateful for all you've done. There are some arrangements which will have to be made to-morrow. I would not trouble you, but I know nothing about the man," passing his hand weakly over his forehead.

"We will come over as soon as ever we can get away. I only wish—" with a glance at Bernard's still face.

"Ah, don't talk of it! You were not to blame—you could not know his weakness, but I ought to have guessed it." He held out his hand to both in turn, and then they silently turned to leave. In the doorway Bertie stopped, feeling that he could not pass Pera without some sign. Yet, what could he say?

"Miss Clifford," he said, hoarsely, "if there is anything on earth I can do for you—!"

She shook her head, and kept her face buried in her hands. She was right; he had no right to express his sympathy—no doubt she was thinking, the sooner he was out of the house the better. If it had not been for him, her cousin's crimes might have remained undiscovered, and he might still be living, with time for repentance before him.

With indescribable bitterness in his heart he stepped out into the cool, starlit night. Through no fault of his own it seemed as if he was destined to bring nothing but grief to the Clifford family. Captain Valentine beckoned to the old butler to come out and speak to them. They had a hasty consultation about necessary arrangements, and then hurried to the stables in search of their horses.

Before they parted for the night, Valentine gave an affectionate grip to Vyvyan's shoulder.

"Well, old man, there's one substantial good come out of this miserable business—you are cleared, thank Heaven!"

"Yes, but don't you see," intolerable anguish in his voice, "she'll hate me for it always?"

He turned away abruptly, and shut his door behind him, as if the subject were too painful for discussion. What was all the honour and the esteem of the world to him if Pera's good opinion were denied him?

Val shrugged his shoulders, thankful that he had not given his volatile heart irrevocably into Miss Clifford's keeping, for love-affairs did not seem to prosper in Blanksshire.

Vyvyan found a tiny note awaiting him from his betrothed:

"Where are you? Have you forgotten me?"
(Signed) "Eva."

He threw it on the table, and himself on his bed. But his imagination was too much excited by the events of the night to allow him to sleep, and before he had enjoyed any

satisfactory rest he had to get up to attend to "stable-duty."

No wonder that Eva's little note was forgotten till he came back to his room just before luncheon. He reproached himself for his carelessness, and wrote a line in pencil to explain that he could not go to Haughton House, as pressing affairs took him in a different direction. Then he remembered how she loved him, with another pang, and added,—

"You know that business alone would keep me from you.—Your own, "B. VYVYAN."

It would have been more like a lover's note if the B had been enlarged to "Bertie," and the "Vyvyan" left out; but he was not in a mood to study trifles, and he thought he had done his duty thoroughly when he remembered to dispatch the letter by special messenger.

As soon as they could get off, he and Captain Valentine rode down to the Gatehouse, where their presence was urgently required. They were of great assistance to Sir Roger, taking much unpleasant work off his hands, and the next day they had to attend the inquest, which was held at a small inn near the Castle.

During this melancholy time, Pera was entirely engrossed in nursing Lucy Mitford, who was slowly brought back to life through constant care. Little Tony cried so incessantly for his mother that Mrs. Jones was at last obliged to bring him up to the Gatehouse in order that he might see her. He would not be content till he had put his golden head close to hers, and touched her poor bruised forehead with his pretty pouting lips. Her eyes followed him longingly, but she was so dreadfully injured by the fall that she had to lie in bed like a log, moving neither hand nor foot. The horror of discovering her husband's body had given a shock to her nervous system from which it would take time to recover, besides her right arm and leg were broken.

Dr. Grosvenor suggested that it would be better to send her to a hospital, but Pera would not hear of it. All Lucy's misfortunes had come upon her through a member of the Clifford family, and she meant to repay the debt as well as she could by nursing her back to health and strength. Fortunately, Lucy had one consolation in her child. For his sake, she was content to struggle back to life, although her husband had gone from her for ever.

Bertie Vyvyan, as soon as he could finish off all the melancholy business connected with the tragedy of the twentieth of August, beat himself to Haughton House with all the calm composure of innocence.

The butler looked grave as he threw open the door, and had no remark to make in respectful fashion about the weather, as he usually did, since Vyvyan had been promoted to the position of future son-in-law of the house. Very much pre-occupied with his own thoughts, Bertie noticed nothing till he found himself face to face with Lady Haughton instead of his betrothed in the drawing-room.

"I hope Eva is not worse?" he said, anxiously.

"If she is worse I don't suppose you will concern yourself about it, Mr. Vyvyan."

"I don't understand you, Lady Haughton," drawing himself up.

"I am afraid I understand you," looking him straight in the face. "By your conduct during the last week, you have shown us that you wish to break off the engagement with my daughter."

"Heaven forbid! What do you think of me, Lady Haughton? Am I lost to all sense of honour? What have I done?" in utter perplexity.

"You have scarcely paid the attention to Eva which she has the right to expect," stiffly.

"Whose fault was that?" his eyes frank and fearless. "Am I to be blamed because I have to help in discovering one murder and preventing another? Do you know that I had a near shave myself? Have you heard nothing of what has been going on?"

Lady Haughton opened her eyes.

"Nothing! Lord Haughton has been away, and I never read the papers."

"Then you don't even know that the body of Anthony Graves has been found, and that I am cleared?" scarcely believing that such a thing was possible.

"Is it really true? I am so glad," holding out her hand for the first time.

Bertie took it, because she was a woman, and in trouble, but he felt very indignant.

"It's a good thing, especially as my friends seem ready enough to believe any evil against me!" he said, bitterly, as his face flushed.

"No, I assure you, that's not the case; only when you stayed away, and sent no answer to Eva's letter——"

"I did send one!"

"It never came. I suppose you forgot it?"

"I didn't forget it, indeed! You must have thought me a brute. I sent it off by Baker next morning. I couldn't do it before, as I never saw her letter till one o'clock in the morning!"

"I wish Eva had known this!"

"Can't I see her? Is she upstairs?"

"Yes. She has not been quite so well during the last few days. But I suppose she will like to see you!"

"I suppose she will," and Bertie smiled, conscious of his power in that direction.

"Perhaps I had better go and prepare her?" hesitatingly.

"Surely we have got beyond that sort of thing. Let me go up and announce myself!"

Pleased at his eagerness, Lady Haughton gave way, only reminding him that she was very weak.

Bertie, grieved to think he had given pain where it would be so deeply felt, hurried upstairs, and into the boudoir, which he entered on tip-toe, as soon as he saw Eva was lying on the sofa with her eyes closed. He walked softly across the thick pile carpet, and bent over her.

The poor girl was certainly an obstacle to his happiness, but his heart went out in tenderest pity towards her, as he saw the sunken cheeks, the corners of the well-cut mouth drooping in such troubled curves, as if she had grown used to pain and sorrow.

She had not lost her beauty, but the spirit of it was changed, and the stamp of fatal delicacy was on it, instead of the strong vitality of former days. She seemed to him like some frail flower, only fit for a hothouse, fading and shrinking in the rough and blustering wind.

The exotic would be sure to fade before the day was over, and the thought flashed across him that Eva Haughton was as surely doomed to death as the hothouse flower. He stooped and laid his gold-brown moustaches on her soft white cheek close against her jetty lashes.

"Poor child!" he murmured, with infinite pity and tenderness, but the tenderness of a brother—not a lover.

The kiss was so gentle that it did not seem as if it could wake her, nor yet the two words; but an electric thrill ran through her at the sound of his voice, and she woke with quivering pulses and fluttering heart, her eyes shining with joy at the sight of his good-looking face.

Then the remembrance of her wrongs came back to her, and her expression changed to one of gentle reproach.

"Why did you desert me?"

"You did not get my letter, or you would have known."

"Then you did write?" eagerly.

"Of course I did, and told you, as you might have guessed, that I was kept away by pressing business!"

"Then you weren't at the Gatehouse as they said?" looking up into his face as if life itself depended on her answer.

"I was, but——" too truthful to hesitate a moment.

"You were!" raising herself on her elbow. "Then go. From this day you are free!"

"Nonsense, child. I went to see a man——"

"Don't try to deceive me. Oh, Heavens!" gasping wildly; "I wish I had never seen you!"

"Eva, listen! It was business!"

"Business!" in utter scorn. "Yes, to make love to Pera Clifford!"

The last words died away, and with her hand on her heart she fell back unconscious, whilst Bertie, in utter dismay, thought she was dead—his young bride dead through doubt of his faith.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BERTIE rushed to the bell and rang a peal, then threw himself down on his knees beside the sofa in an agony of fear.

Lady Haughton, followed by a maid, hurried into the room exclaiming,—

"I thought it would be too much for her. You wouldn't let me announce you. My poor, poor child!"

There was something in her manner, however, as she applied the usual restoratives, that told him his worst fears were groundless.

Eva had only fainted. He was sent out of the room, but he would not leave the house, being unwilling to go away until he had made his peace. Lord Haughton was away, or he would have liked to explain to him that he need no longer fear any scandal being raised against his future son-in-law.

It suddenly occurred to him that he could do it just as well by letter, and he sat down and wrote a full account of what had happened at Lillingsworth Castle.

When he had finished it Lady Haughton came in and told him that Eva was better, but that she would not trouble him to come upstairs.

"Indeed!" she added gravely. "I think you must have offended her deeply, for she tells me that all is over between you."

A look of pain crossed Vyvyan's face. He would have given anything never to have been engaged, but he could not bear to part like this.

"Lady Haughton, is it my fault?" he asked after a pause. "You know that I only went to the Gatehouse on most serious business."

"Why should she mind?"

His face flushed.

"Because she is so weak and ill. She takes fancies into her head. She objects to my meeting Miss Clifford."

How the name stuck in his throat!

"Will you tell her that I only saw her the first night, when she and I and Valentine and a policeman—(could there be any room for sentiment with a policeman to look on?) with a bitter smile—were all there to watch her cousin, and to protect Graves's wife. Afterwards there were horrid details to settle, which are always kept from women, and the inquest, before which Val and I had to appear. Surely no one could think there was pleasure in all that?"

And yet in his inmost heart he knew that it did give him pleasure to do anything for Pera's father, or ever to be under the same roof as she was.

Oh! the rapture and the pain of that meeting at the postern, when he held her two little hands in his, and their two hearts seemed to speak to each other in the throbbing silence!

Even now his rebellious thoughts were full of it, though he told himself that he was a traitor and a scoundrel, and his eyes avoided Lady Haughton's for fear lest she should see the sudden glow in them.

"No pleasure, indeed!" she answered, happily unconscious of what was passing in his distracted mind. "I will explain all this to my poor child, and perhaps after dinner she will consent to see you."

"I must see her," he said, resolutely. "I could not bear to go away and leave her under the impression that I was a brute. Can't I go to her at once?"

"Not for the world," with a smile at his impetuosity, for which she liked him all the better. "She is much excited, and I doubt if it would be wise to agitate her again. Still I will see what I can do later on."

"Please do your very best," he said, entreatingly, "because it drives me half mad to be like this."

Lady Haughton did her very best, because she was in quite a fright lest the engagement should be broken off, not knowing what effect it would have on her daughter's health. But for a long while Eva was quite unmanageable. She declared that she had been cruelly deceived, that whilst she was a prisoner to her sofa Bertie was making love to Pera Clifford, and nothing would induce her to see him again that night.

He was so angry at this that he almost refused to come over the next day; but Lady Haughton appealed to his pity, and he yielded sufficiently to say that he would ride over for half-an-hour before mess.

When he came in, with his head in the air, and his face as grave as a judge, Eva looked up at him with so pathetic an appeal in her large dark eyes, that his hauteur vanished like snow in the sun.

Bertie had an intensely lovable disposition, so placable, so ready to forgive at the first advance, that a quarrel rarely lasted long with him, and he held out his hand with a smile.

"Well, Eva, so you see I was not such a wretch after all?"

"Forgive me, Bertie!" the tears rushing to her eyes. "If I were able to get about like other people I shouldn't be so fanciful; but I lie here with all sorts of fancies coming into my head, and it seemed to me as if you had kept away for months."

"Yes, dearest, I understand," and his arm went round her neck, and his lips were pressed to her cheek, and her tired head sank down on his shoulders.

She asked for nothing more but his presence, and felt supremely happy, because he was near.

Months passed away. First came autumn with equinoctial gales and drenching showers, then winter with terrible cold and biting frosts. Eva lingered on, not making much advance.

"In the winter she will be stronger," said her mother; and when December came, and brought but little improvement, she hoped that the spring would bring her child new life as it did for the flowers.

In March it seemed as if her hopes were to be realised, for Eva rallied so much that the wedding-day was fixed for the tenth of April. A lovely trousseau was ordered from the best shops, and dressmakers came down from London to fit on one exquisite garment after the other.

All the roundness of her figure had gone, and the modistes were prepared to supply any amount of padding to make up for deficiencies.

"What a ghost I look!" said Eva, contemplating her wasted image in the glass, with disappointed eyes.

"Only the more elegant, miss!" affirmed the dressmaker; "and we will make it all right by means of the proper adjuncts. Captain Vyvyan will, indeed, be proud of his bride!"

Bertie was a captain now, and Valentine was thinking he ought to be a major, which was quite ridiculous of him, as majors are always more than sever-and-twenty.

Lady Hargreave carried Pera off to Paris with her for a thorough change. Never having been out of England before, she enjoyed it very much, and soon became her own bright, happy self.

Captain Valentine joined them, and flirted with every pretty French girl he came across, till Lady Hargreave made up her mind that her favourite scheme could never be realised, as he was sure to throw himself away on a foreigner.

(To be continued.)

FACETIE.

SAD jest by a policeman with a large family : "Yes, I'm a cop, and I've many little copies."

THE arithmetic says that forty rods make one road, but one rod will sometimes make one rude boy civil.

WHAT is the difference between having an exact copy of anything, and having an ailing wife and all the children down with the measles? One is a fac simile and the other a sick family.

A PAPER informs its readers that "when a gentleman and lady are walking upon the street the lady should walk inside of the gentleman." But how the lady is to do that it is not stated.

"And she jilted you, did she?" inquired Rufus of Adolphus. "Me deah boy," replied Adolphus, hastily, "neveh use that dwofid word again. Call it a boycott, me deah boy, call it a boycott."

"Yes," boasted a man in a bar, "whiskey gets the best of some people, but I can take it or I can leave it alone." "Won't you have something with me?" asked a listener. "I don't mind. Make it the same as the last, missy."

A TEACHER was endeavouring to explain a question in arithmetic to a dull scholar: "Suppose you had one hundred sovereigns, and were to give away eighty, how would you ascertain how much you had remaining?" "Why, I'd count 'em," drawled the hopeful.

"WELL, what have you got for supper?" asked Mr. Snaggs, as he entered the dining-room. "Why, I have some biscuits that I made myself, dear," replied his wife. "Well, bring them in," said Snaggs, in a resigned tone. "I'm hungry enough to eat anything."

"Ma, has aunty got bees in her mouth?" "No; why do you ask such a question?" "'Cause that little man with a heap of hair on his face caught hold of her, and said he was going to take the honey out of her lips, and she said, 'Well, make haste.'"

A woman told her lover that she could never think of marrying a man with less than £1,000, and as he was only worth a suit of clothes, he went sadly away. That night his uncle died and left him £500. The next day the rejected lover got a letter. It read, "Dearest George, I'm willing to make it £500."

SURPRISE: "Sir, you are no doubt aware of the object of my visit?" Father: "I believe you desire to make my daughter happy. Do you really mean it?" Suitor: "Unquestionably!" Father: "Well, don't marry her then!"

"I can't get up early," said a poor victim to his doctor. "Oh, yes, you can," was the reply, "if you will only follow my advice! What is your hour of rising?" "Nine o'clock." "Well, get up half an hour later every day, and in the course of a month you will find yourself up at four in the morning."

Mrs. MALONEY on calisthenics, as reported by Bob Burdette: "Mary Ann! Phwats that trill-le-loc nonsense yer jiggin' away at in theyre, I want ter know? Put down that fat!" "Don't bother me now. It's practising me calisthenics I am." "Calisthenics, is it! Is that what ye learn at the seminaries? Calisthenics—ah, ha! L'apin' around on the wan fut wid yer toes torned in? Well, do ye calisthenics around here to the teob and warrum the jins av yez elbows be roobin the durt out ov these shirts an' overalls, or I'll tache yea a fancy step wid de broom that'll make ye raise the two feet av yez higher than the spine o' yer back wid no more effort than the howl yell set up for 'em to catch on. Calisthenics, ha! I'll have no more of this jig-jagging around like a hin on a stove-lid. The foorst thing ye know it's joinin' the hally y'll be, an' be spenin' all yer money for clothes, an' wearin' none of 'em. Calisthenics—oh, oh!"

A SAVANT has discovered that man descended from the bear. We have heard before that man ascended from the bear, and have been shown the tree where it occurred.

A LITERARY man who recently tried the power of the human eye on a ferocious bull is recovering from his wounds and bruises, but has lost all faith in such mesmerism.

We saw advertised the other day a "Mahogany child's chair." We have heard of wooden-headed boys, who won't or can't learn at school; but we should be curious to see this mahogany child, whose chair is announced for sale in the public journals.

TOMLINSON: "Good-bye, Miss Eleanor." Miss Eleanor: "But you've already said good-bye to me, Mr. Tomlinson." Tomlinson (who is always ready for some pretty speech): "Have I, really? Well, one can't do a pleasant thing too often, you know!"

HE is seated at a table in a restaurant. Before him is an immense plate of pancakes: "It is singular," he muses; "they say appetite comes with eating. Two oaks, no appetite; three, four, five, six, still no appetite. Decidedly, I am very ill."

MISS KEENE: "Why, Mr. Blondbang, what has caused this change in your appearance?" Mr. B.: "I presume it's my glasses? I've just begun to wear them." Miss K.: "Well, you should always wear them. You've no idea how intelligent they make you look. I scarcely knew you."

Mrs. MALARKEY (to daughter, who is going on a visit to the country): "My dear, you must not wear your best clothes when you are romping in the mountains. I see a man named Good-year advertises the best quality of garden hose at tenpence a foot. That is only one and eight a pair, so you had better go and get some."

A PASSAGE THAT LACKED BRILLIANCE.—"Bromley, you never heard such an eloquent sermon before, I am sure. There was no lagging of interest. Such brilliant passages!" "Yes, Darringer, I admit that. Still, I slept during one of the passages." "You did, eh? Why, Bromley, what passage was it?" "The passage of the collection plate."

BAD NAME FOR A STOVE.—"I was looking at a new stove for you to day, wife," said Crimsonbeak the other day to the partner of his joys and sorrows the other night, as he was about to leave the house. "What was the name of it, John?" "The Husband, I believe it was called." "Oh, don't get one of those. It will be sure to go out every night."

ROUGH ON THEIR MEMORIES.—"I should think those professional oarsmen would be all tired out," said Mrs. Goodman, turning from her newspaper. "Yes," said her husband, "it's a terrible strain on their memories." "Memories? Why, what have their memories to do with it?" "Bless you, my dear, don't they have to remember whom they are hired to beat and whom to let beat them?"

A GREAT NOBLEMAN of the Court of Marie Antoinette was once staying at Woburn, when a bottle of some exquisite old wine was sent for from the cellar. The French Duke took a glass of the precious liquid, and, in answer to a question, announced, with an immovable countenance, that it was "parfait." The Duke of Bedford then tasted it, and immediately got up spitting and spluttering, roaring out, "Why, it is castor oil!"

A SAILOR, having purchased some medicine of a celebrated doctor, demanded the price. "Why," says the doctor, "I cannot think of charging you less than seven and sixpence." "Well, I'll tell you what," replied the sailor, "take off the odd, and I'll pay you the even." "Well," returned the doctor, "we won't quarrel about trifles." The sailor laid down sixpence, and was walking off when the doctor reminded him of his mistake. "No mistake at all, sir. Six is even and seven is odd all the world over. So I wish you a very good-day." "Get you gone," said the doctor. "I have made fourpence out of you anyhow!"

THERE are few disappointments in life equal to that experienced by a man who expects that he is going to sneeze and suddenly discovers he can't.

"How does it happen, doctor?" asked Lawyer Coke, "that so few of your patients recover?" "Probably," very quickly replied Dr. Bolt, "for the same reason that so few of your clients recover."

OLD MAN (who only believes in professional music): "I hope you amateur gentlemen take a real pleasure in performing." Chorus: "Certainly we do!" Old Man: "Then, at least, there is some compensation for the torture you inflict."

FIRST TRAVELLER: "Can you tell me if there's a signal cord attached to this train?" Second Traveller (after looking out both windows): "No; I don't see any." First Traveller: "Then, perhaps, I may trouble you for your purse."

PARIS AT NIGHT.—Two rogues while waiting in a dark corner for a belated pedestrian pass the time in conversation. "The newspapers are right," remarks one, "when they say there is no longer any security in the streets at night." "How is that?" "Why, only last evening two policemen were after me, and I barely escaped being captured."

OFF FOR A DAY'S FISHING.—Smith: "Are the whiskey and cigars all right?" Brown: "Yes, they are under the seat." "And the lunch?" "That's under the seat, too." "And the hooks and lines?" "By Jove! I forgot them entirely." "That's too bad. Well, I suppose we'll have to get along the best way we can without them."

THE STORY is told that Tom Moore and his publisher were making a short pedestrian tour, when, to their surprise, an angry bull stood on the footpath, evidently determined to demolish both poet and publisher. "I think," said the publisher, "that it will be prudent to give this reviewer a wide margin." "Yes," replied the poet; "it appears to be a disputed passage."

SNOBSON (who at the club, is discussing with young Bullock their respective pedigrees): "It's all very well for you to talk, my dear fellow, but Bullock is a doozed vulgar name, don't chew know?" Bullock: "Unknow, and what do you mean, saw? Why, the bullocks came from Yorkshire, saw, now more than five centuries ago." Snobson: "Yaaa, I know, a cause. The Snobs ate them when they got to London, don't chew now."

A MAN rather below the medium height says that he cannot avoid being offended at any reference to his size, and relates how he was once utterly crushed in an argument. He had the best of it, and was walking the room the more strongly to lay down and emphasize his points, when the other fellow calmly remarked, "Sit down, Jones; you look taller sitting down." It made him so mad that he could not say another word.

INTERCHANGE OF MARITAL COURTESIES.—A lady who is widely known, and is known to be a most practical and thorough housekeeper, left her suburban home recently for a little visit in town. The second night after her arrival at little past midnight the household was aroused and the guests greatly alarmed and excited by the receipt of a telegram. Together the guest and her sympathetic hostess opened the envelope with trembling hands, and imagined countless ills before they could decipher the following: "Mr. Dash has sent us a crate of delicious strawberries. What shall I do with them? Answer immediately." As may be imagined the lady, while greatly relieved in mind that no catastrophe had happened at home, was somewhat indignant at having her friend and family aroused from their slumber on account of so simple a matter as a crate of strawberries. The husband's feelings may also be imagined when in the wee hours of morning a telegraph boy brought in reply this message: "Let them rot."

SOCIETY.

The Queen, according to present arrangements, was expected to leave the Isle of Wight on Tuesday evening, the 17th inst., on her customary autumnal visit to Scotland. Her Majesty, who was to travel direct from Osborne, was to cross the Solent to Gosport, and proceed by special North-Western train to Edinburgh, which was expected to be reached on Wednesday, the 18th inst. The Queen, after a short stay at Holyrood Palace, will quit the northern capital for Balmoral.

The arrangements for Her Majesty's reception at the Edinburgh Exhibition include the presentation of the inevitable address, a ceremony that is to take place in the Grand Hall, in the presence of all the local magnates and the lucky season-ticket holders whom the ballot-box favours. After this, the Royal procession will go down the Central Court, visiting any side sections Her Majesty may desire to inspect. That the Queen may give the subject of the exhibits previous thought, and intimate her intentions as to examining them to the Ceremonial Committee, an elaborate plan has been drawn up showing the proposed route, and indicating the exhibits in several courts.

Life of the Queen.—We understand that Mr. Barnett Smith has just completed a "Life of Her Majesty the Queen," which will be published by Messrs. G. Routledge and Sons in the course of a few weeks. It will be in one handsome volume of upwards of 400 octavo pages, and will be embellished by several steel portraits.

The Princess of Wales, on Cup Day at Goodwood, was attired in a delicate dress of French grey, with a satin bodice, and skirt of a flimsy material that had a very charming effect. Her bonnet was of the same fairy fabric. Her daughters were in muslin, and Princess Christian was robed in white.

Earlier in the week the Princess of Wales wore a golden bronze toilette striped with velvet, and a high bonnet of the same colour, her two younger daughters wearing navy-blue frocks flecked with white, and brown jackets.

The New Peerages.—It is stated that Sir Arthur Bass will take the title of Baron Burton, of Rangemore and of Burton-upon-Trent, in the county of Stafford. The title by which Sir Thomas Brassey will take his seat in the House of Lords is Lord Brassey of Bulkeley. Sir Thomas was urged to assume the style of Lord Bulkeley of Bulkeley (a small patrimonial estate which has been uninterruptedly possessed by his family for over 400 years), but he preferred to associate with the name and dedicate to the memory of his father the honour now conferred upon him.

A very stylish affair was the wedding celebrated on the 26th ult., at St. Jude's, Southwark, of Mr. John Duke, eldest son of Mr. Robert Duke, of Bere Hill, Brechin, N.B., with Miss Agnes Beatrice Loudon-Gordon, second daughter of Inspector-General Loudon-Gordon, M.D., R.N.

There were eight bridesmaids, six of whom wore hyacinth satin pointed bodices, and full black draperies, over white lace petticoats, with transparent bonnets of white tulle and jet, with hyacinth-coloured aigrettes. Two younger bridesmaids wore white lace dresses over white satin, with large white satin sashes, and Tuscan hats, with bunches of marguerites, and carried baskets of marguerites in their hands. All wore gold arrow brooches with horseshoes, the gift of the bridegroom, and carried large bouquets of pink carnations and jessamine.

The bride's dress was of white duchesse satin, with long Court train, bordered with white feather aigrettes, over petticoat of white jet; a tulle veil, fastened with diamond stars, and wreath of orange blossoms.

STATISTICS.

Or the 2,550 kings and emperors reported in history, 300 were overthrown, 64 forced to abdicate, 28 committed suicide, 23 became insane or imbecile, 100 were killed in battle, 123 were captured by the enemy, 25 were tortured to death, 151 were assassinated, and 108 executed.

CRIME IN EUROPE.—From the new volume published by the Italian General Direction of Statistics, which contains data from 1873 to 1884, the following figures are taken respecting murder and manslaughter in the following countries. The proportion of individuals condemned is for every 100,000 persons:—In Italy 8.12, France 1.56, Germany 1.78, Germany 1.11, Great Britain 0.60, Austria 2.24, Hungary 6.09, Spain 7.83. Thus Italy, Spain, and Hungary have the unenviable precedence in murder. In offences against morality Italy shows more favourably. The proportion of persons condemned for such offences is in Belgium 15.11 in every 100,000 inhabitants, Germany 14.03, France 9.77, Austria 9.18, Hungary 6.52, Italy 3.77, England 1.74, Spain 0.95. Germany occupies the first place in robbery, the proportions being in round numbers—Germany 222, Italy 154, Great Britain 147, Belgium 128, France 112, Hungary 77, Austria 60, Spain 56. Taking all crimes together, Germany is at the top of the scale, and England at the bottom. The volume, which is compiled with care, shows that crimes in Italy have sensibly diminished since 1880. The total number of condemnations has decreased in the ten years, from 1873 to 1884, from 69,023 to 60,543, and the proportion for every 10,000 inhabitants is reduced from 25.40 to 20.62.

GEMS.

It is the talent but not the genius of human nature to run from one extreme to the other.

WHATEVER difference there may appear to be in men's fortunes there is still a certain compensation of good and ill in all that makes them equal.

WHEN their displeasure is once declared they ought not presently to lay by the severity of their brows, but restore their children to their former grace with some difficulty.

READERS who are in the flower of their youth should labour at those accomplishments which may set off their persons when their bloom is gone, and to lay in timely provisions for manhood and old age.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

ANCHOVY TOAST.—Cut some thin slices of bread about the length and breadth of a finger; fry them in oil. Place them on a dish, and pour on them a sauce made of oil, vinegar, whole pepper, parley, scallion, and shallots, cut up together. Then cut the anchovies into thin slices, and lay them on the toast.

BINDING OF OLD BOOKS.—To polish up the covers of old books when the leather has got dry and cracked, take the white of an egg, break it with a fork, and having first cleaned the leather with dry flannel, apply the egg with a soft sponge. Where the leather is worn or decayed, rub a little paste with the finger into the parts affected, to fill up the broken grain, otherwise the glair would sink in and turn it black. To produce a polished surface, a hot iron must be rubbed over the leather. The following is, however, an easier, if not a better method. Purchase some "bookbinders' varnish," which may be had at any colour-shop; clean the leather well, as before; if necessary, use a little water in doing so, but rub quite dry with a flannel before varnishing; apply your varnish with wool, lint or a very soft sponge, and place to dry.

MISCELLANEOUS.

OUR OWN.—Not only do we love our own little children better than we can love those of other people, says an eloquent writer, but all other things, animate or inanimate, which from our earthly point of view owe their existence to ourselves, have something in them for us that the possessions of other people cannot have. The flowers already partly grown which the gardener sets out in the garden we admire, but how we love the little green heads that peep up where we ourselves have planted the seeds! How we watch their growth and delight in their bud and blossom! The old hen's chickens are downy and pretty, but we care a great deal more for the little, scrappy, motherless one that we hatched out in a basket under cotton-wool at the fireside. Nothing from market teases as well as the things we plant—the strawberries we wait for while they grow, the tomatoes we pick from the bushes as they ripen. And sometimes we think that the rich woman who gives an order for upholstery to this one, and buys bric-a-brac from those who know all about it, though she of course obtains results that are admirable, hardly knows the pleasure of the woman who has papered the wall of her own little cottage, and sewed the carpet, and braided the rug; who has bit by bit, pieced her bed quits, and has made, with her own fingers, the little things that, to her, are so very pretty as they hang on the walls or are seen upon the mantel. And the pride with which a man once told me, "Not only did I earn that house, but my boys and I built it all with our own hands," proved to me that men also have the same feeling. That was not a piece of property valued at so much to this man. It was *his own house*. Into what we do ourselves we weave some of our own life—some hours, some thoughts, some memories, and these things are more our own, by some law of nature we do no fully comprehend, than things can ever be by simple right of purchase.

BIRDS AND THEIR FEATHERS.—The best time for seeing perfect feathering is in the winter, or onward to the spring; then after a very short honeymoon, the birds settle down to domestic drudgery with exemplary ardour, with the result that at the end of a few weeks their tail feathers are rough and irregular, their pinions worn and ragged from contact with the nest in sitting, and by the time their new suit comes at midsummer they are more than ready for it. The spring, of course, is the climax of a bird's life. With scrupulous care he hourly arranges his feathers, all their markings are seen to perfection, and many peculiarities of decoration are then and then alone displayed. The fleshy combs and protuberances become scarlet and enlarged, and any one who has not seen a pheasant or a cock grouse at this season of love would be astonished at the alteration from his normal state. The cock pigeon swells that part of his body most adorned with iridescent feathers to make the grandest show he can; and every humble finch and small bird brushes up his modest finery. It is said that not a single bright coloured feather on any bird's body is left idle or undisplayed. If birds have bright coloured tails, they raise them to their highest and fullest and abase their heads; if bright heads, then they shake out their plumes, their eyes distend and their wattles swell; and it, as in some cases, they have large tippets of feathers falling on both sides of the head, they contrive that the bewildered hen shall see all the glories of both sides at a glance, and so drag all the feathers of the far side round to the near side, making such a huge mass that the face is nearly hidden, and the projecting beak alone shows where the head must be. All this is done for the hen's benefit, and it is only done when she is near; it all turns on her existence, and ceases if she is absent.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ANONYMOUS.—We regret we cannot use your poem.

FRED.—We can find no accounts of the coin, token, or badge described.

C. W. R.—There is not, to our knowledge, any charitable institution of the kind described in London.

L. V. W.—Courtesy requires that the gentleman escort be invited in after the evening entertainment, if the hour be not too late.

F. W. G.—The House of Commons, under the enlarged representation provided for by the Reform Bill of 1867, numbers 670 members. The United States House of Representatives has 325 members.

A. H. H.—Toothache is sometimes prevented by employing as a dentifrice powdered sulphur. Use for the purpose a rather hard toothbrush, and be sure to clean your teeth with it every night. If used after each meal, all the better.

L. L. R.—The Christian name of Miss O'Neill, who married a member of Parliament, was Eliza. Her father was a strolling player. It was at the height of her fame that she married, in 1819, William Wrixon Becher, M.P., who was made a baronet in 1831 and died in 1850.

G. H. S.—Bricks are made from a clay suitable for their manufacture found in abundant quantities all over the world. At the present day brick-making machines have attained a very high degree of perfection, some of them producing from 20,000 to 50,000 bricks per day. 2. Drain tiles are made with the same kind of a machine, possessing a peculiarly constructed die, so as to make the clay into a hollow tube.

B. D. S.—To make tomato wine, take ripe tomatoes and cook them enough to let the juice flow freely. To each gallon of juice add one of water. Then to each gallon of this mixture put three pounds of loaf sugar, and set it by to ferment. After the lees sink to the bottom of the vessel rack off, and add a little more sugar if necessary. Clarify after the second fermentation with isinglass or the white of an egg.

T. G.—We do not think constant practice to make one strong as a Hercules desirable. Those who perform great feats of strength are by no means the surest of health and longevity. Moderate exercise daily, in labour, walking, and special exercises is desirable to keep the system in fine tone, but let it be moderate; any straining of the physical powers is as much to be deprecated as overtaxing the mental and nervous powers. Nature has not provided for such overdrifts on her store.

B. B.—1. The gentleman accompanying the lady to the party must not monopolise her attention entirely, as there may be several others who wish to dance with her. As a general rule the lady is engaged beforehand, and in most cases would it be proper for her to ask a gentleman to dance with her. It is optional with the lady who her partner shall be during the evening. 2. Allow the lady to set the hour when it will be most convenient to leave the ball-room, and do not on any account ask her to leave prior to that time.

S. H. W.—The tincture of muriate of iron is one of the most active and certain preparations of iron, and is usually acceptable to the stomach. It has been recommended as a tonic in scrofula, and is supposed to have a good influence on the kidneys. It is much employed in erysipelas, and, upon the same principle, that of improving the condition of the blood, has been used in various other diseases, as scrofula, diphtheria, and purulent infection of the blood. The usual dose is ten or twelve drops in a wineglass of water, taken immediately after each meal.

H. H. R.—Light from battery electricity was first discovered by Sir Humphrey Davy, at the Royal Institution, London, in 1810. Faraday, in 1831, by his great discovery of induced currents rendered practicable the application of electricity to the production of a good artificial light. It was not, however, until 1855 that the magneto-electric machine was actually applied to the purpose, and in 1857, the first great practical trial took place, when Faraday had the satisfaction of seeing his electric light introduced into a lighthouse at South Foreland, a headland on the southeast coast of England, December 5, 1855, and later it was adopted at Dungeness Lighthouse, on the English Channel.

ROSEANNA.—The young man has seemingly no real affection for you, although he is probably flattered by your evident admiration for him. The fact that he does not come to see you, or take notice of you in company, while he endeavours when you are alone to make you think that you are of importance to him, shows this. His conduct, in acting thus, is not at all open or gentlemanly, although too many young men would do exactly the same under similar circumstances. Your proper course is to fill your life with other things. Make those who live in the house with you happier and less hard-worked than they are now; go among your friends; cultivate the acquaintances of other girls, especially of those who are not very "jolly" or "naturally full of fun" and try to make their lives "jollier" and brighter; read good books; take up some study or pursuit for which you have a natural taste, such as modern languages, music, or drawing. In this way you will learn to get along without the fascinating young man; and if he persists in neglecting you in public, you will be able to punish him by snubbing him, as he deserves, in private.

E. B. G.—Enclose the coin to the Keeper of Coins, British Museum.

JAKE.—1. Your penmanship is excellent. 2. We know of no special significance in the fact of the corner of a letter being turned down.

N. G.—Karl Wilhelm, a German musician, composed the music of "Die Wacht am Rhein," for which the government granted him a pension of 1,000 thalers. He died in 1873 at Smalcald, where he was born.

G. T. W.—There are three kinds of copperas, and they are used in many mechanical processes. You can buy the kind you require at any wholesale chemists and druggists.

JOHN'S DARLING.—The amount varies at different streets, but does not amount to more than twenty-five shillings. See the parish clerk, who will give you every information.

VIOLIN VIRGINIA.—The etiquette is in walking in the street the lady should walk on the inside or that nearest the wall or houses, as she thereby escapes any splashes from passing vehicles, and is most likely to pass along unimpeded; within doors the lady usually walks on the left, but there is no absolute rule, or any particular reason, except fashion, that we are aware of.

A. V. V.—To make rhubarb wine: To every pound of green rhubarb stalks, when bruised, put a quart of cold spring water. Let it stand three days, stirring it twice a day; then press, and strain it through a sieve, and to every gallon of the liquor put three pounds of good loaf sugar; barrel it, and to clarify it hang a piece of laine-glass in the vessel, suspended by a string. Stop up the barrel or cask close. In six or eight months it will generally be ready for use.

WOMAN, GIVE US TRUE WOMAN.

'I'm said by those who ought to know
The belles that put the dash on,
That dead folks' hair from living heads

Will soon be out of fashion;
That hemp will retrograde, and sink
Back to its former uses,
And never rise again to deck
Our Marys and our Lucy's.

That overskirts of every style
And grade will soon go under,
And roomy bonnets, curtained deep,
Will cease to be a wonder;
That twelve good yards will make a dress
Of suitable pretensions,
When thirty-five or forty odd
The grand bon ton now mention.

Oh, will the blessed days o'er come
Old, almost forgotten,
When woman will be woman, not
A bunch of hemp and cotton;
When maids and matrons will not make
More dress a perfect passion,
And spend their precious hours and days
In following after fashion.

M. A. K.

JESSIE.—Makes up your mind to be true to the man to whom you are now engaged, and refuse to see or think of your former lover, and you will probably be more contented and happy in time, than if you give way to your fickle whims. If, however, you never have cared in the least, for your present sweetheart, and think that your old lover can love and trust you despite the past, and that you can be happier with him, tell your fiance exactly how matters stand, and ask his release from your present promise. You need not fear threats. They are very rarely put into practice.

L. V. S.—On the 16th of November, 1869, the Suez Canal was opened in form, with a procession of English and other foreign steamers, in the presence of the Khedive, the Empress of the French, the Emperor of Austria, and others. On November 27 the *Brasilian*—a ship of 1,800 tons, 880 feet long, 30 feet breadth of beam, and drawing from 17½ to 20 feet of water—passed through. Since then the canal has continued in successful operation, and passages have been made almost daily, chiefly by British vessels. The cost of construction of this wonderful water-way is said to have reached, in 1869, between £1 and 12 millions. About 70 per cent. of the shipping and tonnage passing through belongs to Great Britain. The great advantage of the canal is, of course, the shortening of the distance between Europe and India.

EVA.—1. To make blackberry wine, we give you one of the best recipes known to us, as follows:—Press the juice out of sufficient fresh ripe blackberries to make four and a half gallons; wash the pomace in four and a half gallons of soft spring water, and thoroughly dissolve it in six pounds of white sugar to each gallon of water (brown sugar will do for an inferior wine); strain the juice into this syrup and mix them. Fill a cask with it perfectly full, and lay a cloth loosely over the bung-hole, placing the cask where it will be undisturbed. In two or three days fermentation will commence, and the impurities will run over at the bung. Look at it every day, and if it does not run over, with some of the mixture you have reserved in another vessel fill it up to the bung. In about three weeks fermentation will have ceased, and the wine will be still. Fill it again, drive in the bung tight, nail a tin over it, and let it remain quiet until the following March. Then draw it off, without shaking the cask, put it into bottles, cork securely, and seal over. 2. Other like wines take various times to ferment, as experience will teach.

DOLLIE.—The little white spots observable in the finger-nails are due to some subtle action of the blood. They sometimes disappear of themselves, but there is no known method of removing them. In reality they signify nothing, though generally supposed to denote gifts.

L. M.—A mixture consisting of fine honey, 4 ounces, and the best glycerine, 1 ounce, united by heat, to which is added, when cold, 1 fluid ounce of rectified spirit, and 6 drops of ambergris essence, is highly recommended for whitening the face and hands. Keep it well bottled, and apply to the parts when retiring for the night.

ALEX. R.—Rhubarb has decided medical properties, but they are very popular, the first effect upon the system being cathartic, succeeded by an astringent action which checks the excessive operation of the purgative. The medicine at the same time is tonic and diaphoretic, and there is nothing better for relaxed conditions of the bowels, when the stomach is enfeebled by dyspepsia, diarrhoea, dysentery, &c.

T. R. P.—If you possess a taste for music, your age will prove no drawback in learning to play either the piano or guitar. As you have a taste for the former instrument it would be advisable to put yourself in the hands of a competent instructor, and in a reasonable time, with the slight knowledge you possess at present of the instrument, you will doubtless become a good performer.

H. H. R.—Balsam of Tolu is a stimulant tonic, with a peculiar tendency to the pulmonary organs. It is given with some advantage to catarrhal and other pulmonary complaints in which a gently stimulating expectorant is demanded; but should not be prescribed until after the reduction of inflammatory action. Its agreeable flavour renders it a popular ingredient in expectorant mixtures. The balsam is procured by making incisions into the trunk of the tree.

DAISY.—If your father does not wish you to know the young man, you would be wrong and foolish in seeking an introduction. You father probably knows better than you whom it is good for you to have as friends, and he has sources of information about the characters of young men which are not open to you. Under ordinary circumstances you might mention to the hostess at any social gathering, at which the young man and yourself were present, that you would like to meet him.

R. H.—If the daughter is really "beyond your control" we don't say that you can take any steps in the matter. As she is of age, her right to act for herself you cannot deny, and as you differ radically on the question of visitors and visiting, is it not better to acquiesce by not further opposing her? A better feeling—one that might change things wholly—might be established, first, by such acquaintance, and next, by kindly advances on your part to regain her interest, and then to become her entertainer yourself to such a degree that she would care less and less for other company. This seems to us the most sensible course, if you can pursue it.

FRANK.—In one sense, your criticism is just. If a woman was a widow at the time of her death, her husband, of course, must have died before she did. But the words, "the late," in such a case as the one you mention, signify something more than the mere fact that the widow's husband was dead. They also signify that he had died within a comparatively recent period. In the case of a woman who had lost her husband when she was twenty-five or thirty years old, and had lived a widow for forty or fifty years, no one would speak of her as the widow of "the late" John Jones. But if her husband had predeceased her to the grave within a brief period, the words "the late" would be used to indicate that fact.

ELLA V.—There are several wild kinds of roses in the United States, among which are the prairie rose, blooming in July, from which some of the cultivated double pink roses have come; the dwarf rose, which blooms from May to July; the swamp rose, found generally in damp ground, and which blooms from June to September, and the early white rose. The prairie rose, unlike any other native species, has its styles united in a column and projecting beyond the calyx tube. The tea or tea-scented roses are from a variety of the China roses. They have long buds, semi-double flowers, and a fragrance resembling that of green tea. The first rose was introduced into England from Holland in 1596. The yellow rose came from Persia, the musk rose from Persia, China, or India, the cabbage rose from the Caucasus Mountains, and the damask rose from Damascus.

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